

Reflections on Paul Ruwoldt

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I would like to thank the Ruwoldt family and Natalie for allowing me this opportunity to speak during this "Celebration of Life" service for Paul.

I am honored to be standing before you today to participate in the celebration of the life of Paul Ruwoldt.

I will need your help and strength this afternoon as I share my thoughts on the life of Paul Ruwoldt from my own personal perspective.

I can unequivocally say that I was blessed to have Paul as someone I can say was a true friend. Not many fall into that category with me.

I first met Paul in Topeka, Kansas in September 1997, when he was working for PriceWaterhouse as a change management consultant. He took his job seriously and held himself to an extremely high standard of performance and perfection.

Paul and I spent many hours talking about how to bring about change at the Department of Veterans Affairs in support of the introduction of a new personnel/payroll process. The organizational challenges I knew, and the methodologies of change management he knew. Between our collaboration, he was able to develop a communications and change management strategy that served as the basis for moving forward. And Paul was always about moving forward. He was never without a plan and goals to achieve. The mutual respect and professional challenges we shared fueled many of the conversations we enjoyed.

That probably formed the basis of an immediate connection between us as I to held myself to those same standards. We definitely valued that about each other. As we began talking about our work and lives, our friendship was born.

That friendship quickly spilled over into our personal lives – getting together for a few beers, an occasional lunch, a social event, an occasional game of racquetball or just kicking back and enjoying each other's company.

Paul pursued many self-betterment activities like becoming certified as an emergency medical technician, taking boxing lessons, learning golf, enjoying his association with the Washington DC Eagles Australian Rules Football Club and so forth. I admired his desire to be involved and endlessly learn, and the fact that he was fearless.

He was a fierce competitor, whether in sports, personal pursuits or work. No matter what he engaged in, he did so with all of his interest and strength. He saw no obstacles that could not be overcome. He was always remarkably focused on what outcomes he expected.

Paul and I went on a few car hunting ventures. While the road trips and checking out cars was fun, finding the perfect purchase did not seem possible when Paul applied his analytical processes. But somehow he eventually was able to find the ones he needed – most recently the pick-up truck, which would later play a major role in his house renovation plans.

When Paul left PriceWaterhouseCoopers, he was excited about having some time to decide what he wanted to do next in his life. During this hiatus, he was not in any rush to just find a job and continue plugging along. He desired major changes and enhancing his quality of life.

Paul always had a very strong “take charge” aspect to his personality and rarely asked for help unless absolutely needed. He was a self-made man and more a “giver” than “receiver.”

He introduced a new 3-point plan - (1) buy property and a house, (2) find the right person to marry, and (3) have a family. He asked me to periodically check in to see if he was staying true to this plan.

Point 1 of his plan came about with Paul’s purchase of a house in Alexandria, VA. He saw potential in the house and began the project of renovating the house into a home. Many of us probably had an opportunity or two to help Paul out during the different stages of renovation. He put everything into making his dream come true.

Concurrent with his self-improvement plan, he was determined to take the time necessary to find the perfect job situation. He applied and interviewed with the Training Resource Group, Inc., and was quite impressed with their organizational structure, how the company was managed and its broad-reaching mission. The decision to work for TRG was a mutual one on the part of Paul and TRG, and he was pleased to join the company.

His work with the Capacity Project as a project workforce support advisor in Zanzibar developing approaches to improve health care worker efficiency, and strengthening Namibia’s human resource information system and improving the country’s approach to comprehensive HIV treatment are but a few examples of the work he was involved in. What a noble cause. Paul really enjoyed his work and I was impressed by its socially consciousness purpose. His association with TRG added to his world travels and he so enjoyed the opportunity to meet new people and contribute to bettering the lives of others.

But TRG was more than an employer. The flexibility offered Paul over the past year plus, while Paul was receiving medical care, was exemplary. The outpouring of his

colleagues in donating leave during this time demonstrates their kindness. Can you think of a better group of people to call your colleagues. Maybe it was the sense of “family” that Paul saw in TRG that caused him to pursue them as an employer.

His goals continued to be realized when Paul met Natalie. I recall the day when Paul called and invited me to lunch to meet Natalie. Lunch was great and it was evident Paul cared very much for Natalie. Every quality I saw in Natalie that day has proven true and solid as she stood by Paul’s side during the best and most challenging times. We all now know she was the “right” one and their engagement truly showed us all how Paul felt.

Although there were 10 plus years between my age and Paul’s, and many of our activities and friends did not overlap, we always knew that we were there whenever we needed one another. No call either of us made to get together, help one another out or just catch-up over a few beers failed to be answered without anticipation of enjoying each other’s company. That is the best way I can explain how durable our friendship was – it simply never required maintenance. That meant a lot to me.

It was an honor for me when Paul asked me to drive him to Pittsburgh earlier this month to begin the process of entering the clinical trials. I also appreciate the confidence Natalie had in me to allow me to undertake this responsibility.

When I picked up Paul on January 5th, it was with a clear purpose. Paul’s purpose! Get to Pittsburgh, address the medical issues he was facing to get him off the sidelines, and get into the clinical trials which would put him back in the game. That was the “Paul” plan, which he repeated to me about a thousand times just so that I did not forget. That is what we set off to accomplish and I was prepared to serve as his advocate.

Natalie prepared us well with medical history information, an accounting of medications, and about 15 Google maps with directions from Paul’s house to the hotel, from the hotel to the Center, and maps for “just in case you get lost” – no stone left unturned. We were well prepared.

While it was not a comfortable trip for Paul, he maintained his sense of humor and determination. The time we spent together allowed us to speak freely and openly about his circumstances, how we looked at and valued life, and what we had done with our lives. He appreciated all that he had personally accomplished but looked forward to doing more.

We were also equipped with our laptops so that “we could get some work done” as well. We were definitely prepared.

But work, laptops, TV, radio, and all the other items that generally takes up our time each day took a back seat to the need for and immeasurable value of basic human interaction. Talking, laughing, taking jabs at one another, recommitting to the plan of action, checking and double checking the time of his appointment, and at times just sitting silently together understanding our common purpose – that’s what consumed our time

and minds. However, he did find the time to offer me some tips on how I might improve my work habits and do better at delegating work. He felt I worked too much and too hard!

Paul spoke often about how fortunate he was to have found Natalie and that she was a part of his life. He appreciated her tenacity in keeping him on track with his health care and in other aspects of his life. Clearly Natalie was the other half that made Paul whole.

Of special note, Paul spoke to me of the value he placed in the time spent with his brother, Nicholas, during a road trip last year. While he did not relay much in the way of details, whatever happened during that trip gave Paul much comfort and he was confident that Nicholas understood his situation much better. Those moments will always belong to only Paul and Nicholas.

He told me that he was at peace and had no regrets. He just wanted to be able to fight long enough to beat this thing that had a hold of him. Again, he was focused on the fight and never threw in the towel.

Paul called me on January 12th excited by the first opportunity he had in days to drink pretty much anything he wanted. For days he was denied liquids and this was a defining moment of improvement to him. While I had hoped to have had more conversations with him, I am comforted in remembering an enthusiastic Paul from that conversation.

I returned to Pittsburgh on January 22 to spend time once again with Paul. Although his ability to communicate was limited, I am certain he could hear as I reminisced over the span of our friendship and shared with him how valued a friend he was. The day we met is permanently etched in my mind and that is the Paul I will always see when I think of or talk about him.

If I were to choose one phrase to sum up Paul to me, it would be “a genuine friend” who left his footprints on and impact in many corners of our world.

In closing, I would say here's to you Mate! You are the best and God bless.