

8/13/16

For Michael

Married to my sister, Irene, Michael was an important member of my family for 35 years and more.

When I think back through the years, my memories are of the two of them paired-- Irene and Michael, Michael and Irene. Their marriage was a model for me, especially in communication. Specifically, I would be present at times as they asked each other questions. What I noticed that was a good example for me, is that they gave each other time to ponder, and not have to immediately have the proper answer.

It is not surprising to me, as I talk to my sons, Trevor and Ian, that we all think of Michael as being the quintessential family man. In playful moments through the years, Irene has said to me with mock resentment, "You got the horse," and I reply, less mockingly, "You got the husband."
Boy, did she!

Michael cared most for the comfort of his family, and worked hard to provide a beautiful home for Irene, Gregory, Amanda, and himself. He provided for the best education for his children. He made sure that his family's interests were supported. He told me once that he had decided to move away from Silicon Valley, even if that was not his best career move, because it was better for his family. With seeming prescience, he said, "No one on their deathbed says,"I wish I had worked more.'"

As his in-laws, we also benefited from Michael's generosity. For example, he was always willing to help us with technical expertise, pickups for elderly parents, occasional childcare. More than once, he agreed to loan me money for a car or other necessity-- loans which I earnestly repaid, which helped ease my way mightily when raising my kids. While still recovering from heart surgery last year, Michael helped dig the grave for my beloved dog, Nigel.

Despite long association, and Michael's generosity, he and I had relatively few close conversations. Me, being shy, and he, being private, and working at businesses I hardly understood, our connection was kind of like two satellites orbiting the world that was Irene. But over the years we grew closer.

So, when Michael received his diagnosis, and a bit of time passed, it was wonderful how he opened up to all of us about his process of living with cancer. He was very courageous and it was gratifying to talk up front with him about living and dying. I had to be courageous too, because he attributed my sadness to deaths of other loved ones. I had to tell him that my sadness was directly connected to **his** impending death. I couldn't let him get away with belittling his importance to me.

That is how Michael was: confident on one hand-- the most successful person I knew, and on the other hand, unassuming.

I was grateful for those last several months. While I didn't want him to die, I think Michael lived in a magnificent way through his illness. What a gift to me to be able to help he and Irene in those last weeks. It was the right place for me to be, and I wouldn't have wanted to be anywhere else.