

Rodney Sherrill, A Good Man

By Susan Dempsey

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Lesley asked me to speak on behalf of her and the family today. I hope to do justice to the memories you all hold dear of Rodney, and I pray you forgive me in advance for lack of knowing more of your stories. I hope you all will share those snippets of history with each other as we forge through this river of grief together. For as that inspired author, Anonymous, said, "When someone you love becomes a memory, the memory becomes a treasure." Let's share that treasure and make it grow.

I first met Rodney a decade ago, when Lesley introduced us at Pegg's not long after they started dating. She'd introduced me to other guys, but this new one had that spark that held her interest, so I paid attention. He seemed quiet...at first, and he had a smile that I've come to know as his "Cheshire Cat" grin. You know what I mean—that look that told you he knew something you didn't know or that meant he was waiting to share a story that'd make you laugh.

And he liked to laugh. Rodney appreciated hearing a good joke or story as much as he enjoyed telling them. Perhaps that was why he had good friends surrounding him. He listened, usually with that smile on his face, nodding along.

But he was also a man his family and friends could depend upon for help when needed. Granted, he may not have been a superhero who chased villains, but he was one who stood for right, not wrong. He wasn't perfect, but he was a good man.

The eldest of the three Sherrill brothers, Rodney shouldered a lot of responsibility at a young age. Perhaps that's why he was a friend to turn to. After their dad died young, their mom, Jeanette, succeeded--against great odds--to rear three very active boys to be good men. She set the example, and they followed. I knew her, and I can tell you she was a very hard worker! Rodney quit school in his teens and went to work to help Mom make ends meet. Harry Golden, the late newspaper publisher, once said, "the only thing that overcomes hard luck is hard work." I think Rodney was listening.

He worked several jobs, including a short time at local Fenway Wire Cloth, before joining Argo Products in St. Louis, where he spent the bulk of his career. He spent long hours bending wire and crafting metal, finally becoming a production supervisor. He worked very early and long hours for years, rarely missing a day. His work ethic is

known to many, as he's one of a languishing breed of workmen who dedicate themselves to their daily tasks with skill, fortitude and pride. We can only hope the next generation represents themselves as well. After decades, last June, Rodney announced that he decided to retire.

Now, he and Lesley had built a very nice house in Robertsville, but he wanted to be done with it all and move to the lake...Lake Wappapello that is. So they put the house on the market and made plans. After a year, they closed on the sale. Meanwhile, Rodney celebrated his last day of work at Argo at the end of May. Once they found the right place, they officially moved to the lake.

His work life was balanced with a full family life. Having married Patti McNamee when they were teens, they soon welcomed a son, Jeff, who resembles his dad in all good ways and gives us hope for the next generation. After a divorce, they remained friends to this day. Rodney had another significant partner in Missy, and they had a daughter, Michelle, who is now grown with a daughter of her own. When he and Lesley married in April of 2009, he became step dad to Brandon, Tommi and Jessica as well. I can tell you he considered that move very carefully and chose to take on that responsibility. Since that time, he has welcomed three grandchildren, Braydon, Colton and Indiana, while teaching and caring for his stepchildren through their adolescence and young adulthood. He's taken great pride in watching graduations, posing for pictures with them in formals, and attending concerts. He enjoyed playing with his grandkids, nieces and nephews too.

A muscle car fanatic, Rodney owned a Corvette, and most recently a beautiful trophy, turquoise Blazer that was his pride and joy. He liked to putter in his shop, and he and Brandon spent some time together wrenching things back together. He also got a kick out of mentoring Tommi Nicole with welding. I remember him bursting his buttons when Tommi started to make her own horseshoe artwork a couple years ago. I watched him give Jessie and nephew Levi rides in his old pickup through the mudpits and taking great joy in their laughter and squeals to "do it again!" ...and he did.

Rodney liked to party with others, and he loved his beer. Many of us do, of course. But his smile and silliness made those around him happy. He's been known to start dancing when the mood strikes, whether there's a dance floor or not.

He and his friends would tease one another, or as the guys would say, "give each other a hard time." And they'd come up with some great ideas. He and Wayne Wells decided to go into the firewood business a couple years ago. They thoroughly enjoyed chopping and splitting wood together for hours on end. Then they gave the wood away instead of

selling it. I guess their joy was in the work, not in making a buck. It was either that or dancing with a drunk rooster, but I'll let Wayne tell you about that. I'm afraid PETA may hear, and I can't be held responsible! Speaking of Wayne, he was Woody, to Rodney's Buzz. Where one was, the other couldn't be far away. He and Angie moved to Robertsville just so those two could have a few beers together and walk home afterward. At the end of the day, he'd tell his buddies he had to get home when the street lights came on, earning him the nickname of Pops from Bernie.

He had a soft spot for the family's animals. I know he liked the chickens they had, but I also know he loved the dogs. Gabby, Molly and Piglet would get rides with him on the Rhino all the time, and he gave them nicknames too, some of which I could tell you and some not. But Rufus was his closest buddy. Rufus chose Rodney, not the other way around. The photo you see here is the two of them enjoying the sunset at Wappapello together, the man and his dog.

He often listened to 70s classic rock, but evident of the soul he possessed before his own time, he loved Elvis. He'd pull Lesley onto the dance floor if the King's music was on. The two of them could be found many times at the Dew Bolt Inn or the Sisters Saloon in Catawissa, laughing and sharing the company of friends.

The two of them would wait for Bruce and Stephanie 'til dark and take their 4-wheelers out to ride trails in the woods under the moonlight. They loved going to the wineries and unique out of the way spots together. One of his favorite spots to stop when they took one of their frequent road trips was the Elbow Inn. He and Lesley also took a few memorable cruises, including places that will now never be the same, like St. Thomas or Key West. That's what it was about—enjoying life.

Such was a good man blessed with the good things life offered. Rodney may not have reached an age on Earth we consider advanced, but he accomplished his dreams and thus lived a very full life.

And now we say goodbye to our friend, brother, father, uncle, and husband as he exits this world. But I can hear him saying something, quoting Elvis, as he waves to us from the light, "Until we meet again, may God bless you as he has blessed me."

