

Robert George

Funeral Service

Saturday, March 29, 2014

Minister Julian Branston's Introduction

We are gathered here on this spring morning to honor and celebrate the life of our beloved friend, Robert George.

We welcome the family. Cristina here, together with Robert's children; Rebecca of course, while we also welcome Sara and Robert Edmund. Robert said, very recently, how absolutely clear his connection was to each of his children. And from Detroit, we welcome Robert's sister Carol, her husband Bob, and Robert's sister Diana and her husband Paul.

The splendor of the celestial firmament may be eclipsed for a time, but never extinguished. A star that climbs to its appointed height cannot be obscured by death. Let us remind ourselves that Robert's youthful spirit, with divine guidance, ascends above the mortal realm.

Let us stand and remember our friend Robert in silent presence.

(Silence)

Thank you, please be seated.

Each student, through their being and their efforts, forms a jewel in the crown of our school. Each student raises our School and enriches our lives.

Our Teacher has said, 'Ascending souls finish their roles very well prepared, having received the presence allotted to them in this lifetime.'

As Robert returns to the divine source, we too share the same passage; we too are a witness to the greatest mystery of life.

Music: Sharon Shelton

Gershwin, Summertime

Reading: Rebecca George

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature's changing course, untrimm'd;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st;
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Shakespeare

Eulogy for Robert George from Roger Shelton and Robert E George

Robert Edmund:

My father loved to tell stories. He loved to so much, he'd usually start laughing or crying at the punch line, depending on the story, before he had a chance to deliver it. This is a story he told me

when I asked him once about his earliest memories. He was only four or five, the second youngest of six kids, walking with his family through a neighborhood in Detroit. His father, a loving but stern Lebanese man, was still alive then. As they walked, his older brothers and sisters ran off ahead, leaving him, his parents and his younger brother Mike behind. He started to run to join them, when he turned back and saw his mother and father there behind him. Like a body acted on by equal forces in opposite directions, he was *still*; and for the first of many times in his life, he found himself in between, caught at the fulcrum of different people, different places, and different worlds, inviting his love and his presence.

This story, like some of our father's best stories, doesn't really have an ending. From his telling of it, it was the kind of moment that presents us with a tension to which there may be no resolution. As Roger put it when I told him this story, my father was the rock in the hard place; when love pulls you in so many directions, which way do you go?

My father spent his life answering this question. I think this is what first attracted him to performance arts when he was young. Theater was a form that allowed him to give himself to others. Much to the chagrin of his father and the concern of his mother, but as in everything with their support, he left his speech and communications major at the University of Michigan to study with a troupe of mimes for a year. He later said he made the change because he wanted to be the words he'd learned. Interestingly enough, this meant going from speech to silence. Theater turned into a lifelong practice for him that everyone in this room is familiar with, but it wasn't enough. The stage was only a forum for his giving in particular moments in time. His search to discover how to give himself to love in all moments led him to the School, which he joined in Detroit, Michigan, September of 1976. It was two years later, while living at the New York City center, that he met my mother. She says she first noticed him in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He was sitting in front Rembrandt's self-portrait, weeping.

Throughout his life, as an actor, a student, a friend, a brother, a son, a husband and as my father, he found himself again and again in between, caught in the middle of such abundance, all for him to love, as he had been when he was young. He struggled with an impossible task: to give all of himself to this abundance. This task was his improbable solution to the dilemma of beholding so much to love. And as it often seems to go when we set out to accomplish the impossible, my father would hold only himself accountable for any failure he perceived to love more completely. For all the love he gave, it was never easy for him to extend it to himself.

But still, he made the effort, every day, to give himself and his love, with simplicity, honesty and joy, to whatever part of that abundance was before him in the moment. You can see the fruits of those efforts in the lives of his friends and family in the room today.

Roger Shelton:

From that first stillness, his early self-awareness continued to grow and develop. As it did, his characteristic impulse became that of enabling others through his loving. Recently one student wrote that Robert was graced with an innate appreciation for what was best in others. Another student, commenting on Robert's ability to encourage others to bring their best to the moment saw it this way: Robert was the rare one with a heart that could openly express appreciation for the virtues and efforts of others; he never harbored envy. That meant that those around him opened and thrived.

From the time of our first meeting in 1977 Robert saw things in me that I could not see in myself. Conversation was an important part of our friendship, and, from time-to-time and apropos of nothing remarkable, he would exclaim 'That's what I love about you!' and then go on to tell me just how my picture of myself should be expanded to include the way he saw me. Many of us were on the

receiving end of this generous spirit.

He was not always so generous with himself. When he found himself pulled between competing loyalties with no 'right' solution available he could agonize over what felt like a failure to live up to his own standard of personal responsibility. Often he kept these agonies private; sometimes when he shared them, he could not be comforted. But, in the end, he was able to move beyond all this.

Several days before his death, before it was clear that the illness was serious, Rebecca asked her father what he understood this play of illness was about. His surprising reply was that he believed the lesson was learning to receive love.

One evening, his second night in the hospital, he suddenly awakened, saying *Where am I?* Then, *Oh, I'm with Team Rilke*, dropping back asleep as quickly as he'd awakened. And so, surrounded by those who kept vigil with him during his final week, he began to relax into the love of his friends, and to let go of his impossible task.

Following the first stroke Robert asked the eye doctor about recovering the parts of his vision that had been compromised. When told that he faced permanent eye damage he paused for a moment, took a breath, and said *Oh... alright*, swallowing whole this new reality of things as they are. Later, he shared that though his fears had come to pass, he was no longer afraid of what the future held; he had certainty that the moment was always perfect.

Our friend Robert has gone on before us, gone beyond the veil that only death can lift. And, in the end, we are left with a wordless beholding.

Music: Michael Parks

Beautiful soup

Reading: Sara George

Good-bye my Fancy!

Farewell dear mate, dear love!

I'm going away, I know not where,

Or to what fortune, or whether I may ever see you again,

So Good-bye my Fancy.

Now for my last – let me look back a moment;

The slower fainter ticking of the clock is in me,

Exit, nightfall, and soon the heart-thud stopping.

Long have we lived, joy'd, caress'd together;

Delightful! – now separation – Good-bye my Fancy.

Yet let me not be too hasty,

Long indeed have we lived, slept, filter'd, become really blended
into one;

Then if we die we die together, (yes, we'll remain one,)

If we go anywhere we'll go together to meet what happens,

May-be it is you the mortal knob really undoing, turning – so now finally,

Good-bye – and hail! my Fancy.

Walt Whitman

Minister's Conclusion:

A king of ancient times said, 'I am only a child, yet without ceasing, by day and by night, I act in harmony with heaven.' Robert is now a part of that strong loveliness above us. Made lovelier still because he bore his part. His is a new succession in the celestial world, where emerging into beauty, one looks back on trees and beasts, upon humanity from a compassionate light.

May Robert's thoughtfulness bring us to a deeper place in ourselves.

May his ardent living of life inspire us to fearlessly Be.

And may his devotion to his Teacher, his family and friends strengthen our commitment to each other.

Dear Robert, Excellent Friend, Good Philosopher, Fellow traveller, we thank thee.

Candle ceremony

"Our body is just a shell, our soul will continue."

Extinguish and light the candles.

The urn is lifted and others are motioned to stand. Urn-bearer leads procession.

At the Cemetery:

Minister's Introduction

Here in this sacred place, consecrated by those here present and those who lay here, we release Robert to his and our true home.

Reading: Michael Golding

Afoot and light-hearted, I take to the open road,
Healthy, free, the world before me,
The long brown path before me, leading wherever I choose.
Henceforth I ask not good-fortune – I myself am good fortune;
Strong and content, I travel the open road.
The earth – that is sufficient;
I do not want the constellations any nearer;
I know they are very well where they are;
Allons! the road is before us!
It is safe – I have tried it – my own feet have tried it well.
Allons! be not detain'd!
Let the paper remain on the desk unwritten, and the book on the shelf unopen'd!
Let the tools remain in the workshop! let the money remain unearn'd!
Mon enfant! I give you my hand!
I give you my love, more precious than money,
I give you myself, before preaching or law;
Will you give me yourself? will you come travel with me?
Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?
Walt Whitman

Music: Sharon Shelton

Mitch Lee, Impossible dream

Minister

We return Robert's ashes to the ground; from earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, we look toward eternal life.

Urn bearer puts urn in the grave.

Minister and family take rose petals and one by one, each put them into the grave. Family rises and withdraws.

Minister's Conclusion

Rabia said, 'Love comes from eternity, and returns into eternity'. The inner divine flame returns to its divine source. The circle of life is complete.

We only part that we may meet again.

Let us bid farewell, and withdraw for a toast at the Royal festival Hall.

Rose-petals offered to the assembly.