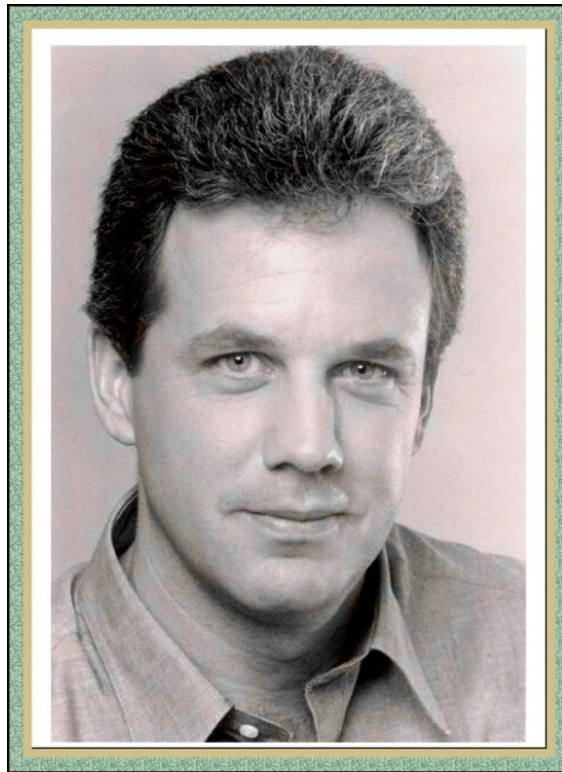




ERIC GULBRANSON : 1962-2018

A CHAMPION HOME FROM THE WARS

I doubt that anyone who has ever known Eric Gulbranson even briefly has ever forgotten him. He was just too much of a dynamo of enthusiasm, friendliness and generosity. A scripture describing Jesus comes to mind that might convey something of Eric's charisma: In him was life, and that life was the light of men. Eric was truly a high beam going some place to light it up.

That's because so much of his enthusiasm was real, coming from the Jesus inside him: That skinny, hyper nephew of mine, once laden with insecurity and self-doubt, bumped into Jesus and came to realize that his true mission in life was to tell as many people as possible the good news of the gospel of amazing grace. And if he overwhelmed you at times with his pell-mell non-stop descriptions of close encounters of the God kind, well, that was something that this new-born herald for Jesus just maybe couldn't help but proclaim.

And here's the astonishing thing, he didn't turn into the guy preaching from a stump on some street corner- -no way! Eric turned into a six foot four inch heavily- muscled beaming blue-eyed corrections officer at Lexington an Oklahoma State Prison. And who made up his congregation? Hardened criminals and born losers of every stripe and color and kind. And in that job in which most guards burned out before five years, Eric found his perfect ground to grow like a tree planted by the rivers of water, whose leaf never withers, and who brings forth much fruit.

Somehow Eric was able to move about in that dark, demonic world and light the way for many out of darkness into glorious Son-lit uplands. He could out-perform most in what ever feat of athleticism they came up with. One way or another he won their love and respect - - mainly I think, by showing them the kind of love and respect he beamed on everyone he met. I never saw Eric lord it over anyone.

The prisoners nick-named him "Coach" --quite an irony given the fact that back in his high-school basketball days he was such a free spirit he had a dickens of a time adjusting to his coaches' well-disciplined brand of ball. Maybe Eric thought that if you could sink thirty-foot fall-away-jump shots with your back three feet off the floor, why worry about rebounding and defense? But I think Eric came to learn discipline the hard way as a prison guard. He mentioned more than once that a guard pretty much needed eyes in the back of his head in order to survive unarmed among prisoners who might very well be armed. The con you were joking with and laughing with one day, might very well try to stick a shiv into you the next. Lots of schizoid behavior among the prisoners--- bi-polar swings between wild hilarity and hellish malice.

A recent report from one of Eric's fellow officers said that they were really distraught over how they were going to survive without Eric there to bolster their confidence and help them deal with their fears. The morale there when Eric first arrived twenty some years ago was about as low as it could be, but Eric brought a whole new aura of faith and confidence that buoyed them all up.

I think of Bardolph, a drinking buddy of the huge, rollicking, bigger-than-life figure, Sir John Falstaff. In Shakespeare's history plays. When Falstaff's passing was reported, Bardolph groaned, Would I were with him where some ere he is either in heaven or in hell. I care not, I just want to be where he is. His was a spirit of unquenchable grief over losing the one person who gave his life meaning. and Cleopatra at Anthony's death cried out: Bravest of men, wouldst die? Must I abide in this vile world, which in thy absence is no better than a sty?

Perhaps some of the prisoners Eric knew felt the same way. I had a snap-shot vision of inmates raking their tin cups across their bars chanting, we want coach; where's coach? And I know that many sitting here feel the same way thinking of Eric. God makes innumerable irreplaceable people. Each of us says the Bible is a masterpiece in the making. But Eric was truly one of a kind--a diamond cheerfully enduring the cutting; away of his rough edges, and he was really starting to shine and getting good a helping troubled people find the way. The overwhelming question then is why? King Lear put it perfectly--Why should a dog, a horse a rat have life And thou no breath at all? He could only howl as he sat there holding the lifeless body of his beloved Cordelia, the light and hope of his life. His fool, Lear's court jester sums it up, So out went the candle - And we are left darkling.

Nevertheless there are many voices of hope for the faithful. Isaiah's prophecy can not be ignored: *"Arise Shine! for thy light has come, and the Glory of the LORD is risen upon thee.. For darkness shall cover the earth and gross darkness the people, but the LORD shall arise upon thee and His glory shall be seen upon thee."*

That means if you've said yes to Jesus, you too are going to shine. Now as we all try to deal with the news of Eric's death, Lisa, my daughter has come to realize that her seeing that astonishing account was no accident. It has gone far to help her deal with Eric's passing knowing by faith that Eric is in a place more breath-takingly beautiful than words can possibly tell.

Walt Whitman tried: Keep on! There are divine things well enveloped; I swear to you there are divine things more wonderful than words can tell. And my mother's favorite verse, *"Eye hath not seen nor ear heard nor has it entered into the mind of man what God has prepared for those who love Him."* So take heart dear friends of Eric, believing he IS alive and well somewhere up there. Black Elk spoke of a place, " -- where all the folk are brilliantly alive and summer lingers and the bison thrive." A place like the one the poet Shelly envisioned, Peopled by "shapes too bright to see."

Joseph Prince, Singapore's brilliant apostle of grace suggests that in Heaven, we will be given the whole universe to explore much as William Blake envisioned it - - going anywhere in an instant, safe in our chariots of fire, and we will have all of eternity to explore it. Even more wonderfully, we shall get to know Him *who was and is and is to come*, Jesus Christ, the Savior Eric loved so well.

Two other scriptures come to me this funeral morning. The first picks up on the metaphor of a diamond being cut: And they shall be mine saith the Lord of Hosts in that day when I make up my jewels, and I shall spare them as a man spares his own son. And that reminded me of the little song we sang right here in Sunday school: "*When He cometh when He cometh to make up His jewels; Little children little children His love and His joy. Like the sun in the morning, His bright crown adorning, They shall shine in His glory, Bright gems for His crown.*"

And from Malachi 4:2: "*But unto those who fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and they shall go forth like calves of the stall.*" So fare well, loved boy; your stay with us down here was far too short, but we'll all be together very soon, ONE FINE DAY-- UP HOME!

Gene Pinkney/ 7/27/18