

Governor Robert D. Ray

Family Eulogy

July 13, 2018

J. Scott Raecker

On behalf of Mrs. Ray and the entire Ray family I want to express their sincere appreciation for the outpouring of love, support and prayers at this time. They have asked for me to share that following the service there will be a reception at The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center on the Drake campus - which is walking distance from the church.

So here we are Mrs. Ray, back at First Christian Church where your lifelong love story with Governor Ray started 73 years ago. You met through this church and church camp where you were elected King and Queen. You became high school sweethearts – you the smart looking girl with the car and Governor Ray the shy school-boy athlete.

Together we've looked at the pictures of the two of you in those early years - you and Governor Ray had a youthful twinkle in your eyes and a shining smile that said – 'I'm in love' - and that's one thing that did not change over all these years.

Recently you told me that in the last several months it was just nice to sit and hold hands and tell each other 'I love you'- and as I observed these moments, I saw that same twinkle and shining smile in both of you – and, oh my heavens, it still radiated – 'I'm so in love.'

You also shared that you never had a fight – and I believe you. However, with all due respect, it has come to my attention through an un-named grandchild that there were a few disagreements – mostly over ice cream at McDonalds, and they were resolved with another Diet Coke and a loving grandpa slipping a dollar under the table to a very happy granddaughter.

In your understated way you told me he was a 'special person' – which he was – and together you were spectacular...you were always his beloved Billie Lee – and you most certainly were his beloved soul mate.

Mrs. Ray, here is the message for the rest of us today – if there is an aspect of Governor Ray’s life that should inspire us, and we should seek to emulate, it should be this – his excellence as a man devoted to his family – and that passion was rooted deeply in his faith, his love for you and his desire to serve others in love.

It’s no secret that Governor Ray’s favorite titles in life were husband, father and grandfather - and he took them seriously – and with good humor.

It has been said that you can tell what kind of parent you are by how your grandchildren turn out - and how your children care for you as you age. And by all measures Mrs. Ray – you and the Governor were an extreme success.

Randi, Lu Ann and Vicki, he loved you girls – unconditionally. And, a gift he gave you...is that you all know that fact.

Whether singing out to you as his ‘Miss America’ or, telling you at a time you needed to hear it the most, that ‘you are always beautiful in my eyes’ – he loved you in actions that reflected his words.

And even when some boundaries needed to be set (you know what I’m talking about), that was also done in love, sometimes frustratingly so for you as he always wanted to talk things out and think through the best resolutions and consequences.

He was your hero, he was patient and calm, and even in the darkest moments he looked for the positive. He was inclusive as reflected best in his love for you son-in-laws.

And one of the things I have heard, and seen from you as daughters, and the grandchildren as well, is this – his admonition to “Do more, speak less – and if you have to speak, think before you speak.”

Now for you grandchildren, Robert, Jeffrey, Billie Ray, John, Michael, Emma, Leah and Sadie - he absolutely adored and cherished you – he was so proud of each of you. He talked more about you than anything else. And, he loved taking pictures of you.

I've watched you grow up directly, or through his stories, and see so many traits of him in each of you. In fact, you shared with me the traits you possess that you saw in your grandpa. And here they are, listen closely...

Empathy, kindness, humor, humility, honesty, sense of justice, respect, compassion, considerate, loyalty, self-confident, attention to detail, positive, caring, adventurous spirit, modest, selfless, charisma, perseverance, appreciation for other cultures, a good and sometimes slow decision-maker, a genuine and good hearted person, never mad, peace-seeking and relationship centered.

And of course, love of ice cream and chocolate chip cookies.

You also shared that one of the qualities you admired most about him was that he was always 'more interested in your opinion than telling you his opinion.' A good lesson for all of us.

And I loved this trait you shared – 'he adored my grandma – and so do I.'

Think of this list for a minute – these are the traits that emanate from you – that is what a lasting legacy looks like. And each of you grandchildren will continue to make your lives, and the world, a better place because of these traits.

And, for the rest of us, these are qualities we also saw in your grandpa that continue to shape our lives.

When you unpack the list and look deeply into the character qualities you share with your grandpa – there is something that resonates clearly – and for your grandpa it was developed in this church early in his life.

They are called 'fruits of the Spirit' - they are found in Galatians 5 and they define your grandfather's life – they are "love, joy, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."

Of these fruits of Governor Ray's spirit, love was first and foremost – and the fruits of his spirit were these words...in action.

Mrs. Ray, Randi, Lu Ann, Vicki, grandchildren, and the entire family – Governor Ray's family legacy lives on in you and is a lesson for all of us.

His faith driven love served us all – and while most directly to you the family – he also served those of us who were blessed to call him a friend.

Governor Ray loved quotes and we shared many over the years. One that I gave him that he liked was from Richard Bach who said:

“The bond that links your true family is not one of blood, but of respect and joy in each other's life. Rarely do members of one family grow up under the same roof.”

I thought of this quote as I spoke with Tai Dam refugee and family friend, Som Baccam, this week when she referred to Governor Ray as her ‘savior’ - and he literally was.

Savior is a strong and powerful word, and when I reflect on times Governor Ray used that word in our discussions about faith – he talked about how his Savior demonstrated unconditional love – sacrificial love - service love – so that we could love others and know our eternal home.

Governor Ray has left our earthly home and created a void in our lives.....and that hurts, however, I would challenge us to think that the real void would be if we had never had his presence in our lives.

Governor Ray set the standard for how to treat people...and we can all be better people if we look to Governor Ray as a model.

For me, and I hope for each of you, I want to be a better person each day because of Governor Ray and his presence in my life. I’ve felt that way since the day I met him...and I will for the rest of my life.

The inspiration of Governor Ray’s life is that we shine our light in the lives of others when we demonstrate love – and we must remember to shine that light first and foremost with our family and friends.

I challenge us all to honor his legacy by aspiring to be better people - by shining our light in our homes, with our family – and with our friends.

Letting our light shine may be his most important lesson.

One more time - Governor Ray leading the way.