

Jim Nash

March 9, 2015 10:24am

10 years...10 years to the day since my Uncle Redmond A. Simonsen died.

Please take a minute to read my post. I've updated it a bit since the last time I published it.

A few years ago I found the watch you see below which belonged to my uncle Redmond. The watch is ordinary, even pedestrian to some but it is a prized watch in my collection.

You see, ten years ago today, my Uncle Redmond passed away. Redmond was the one man that I had that was a true mentor in my life. He was something of a father figure for me as growing up my own father being somewhat of a failure for me. Redmond was a calming voice in a very tumultuous time.

Redmond was perhaps the single most intelligent man I have ever known. He had an IQ well over 200 and was a legend in his industry. He revolutionized the strategy war board gaming industry in the late 1960's and 1970's. He and a friend of his created a company called SPI and Redmond was the designer of every game interface that was cranked out of that company. He was a very busy man and yet he would find time to visit, send letters, gifts, and would call you on your birthday and talk to you like you were his equal. He would send you cool games that he himself had played first, complete with handwritten notes that told you where it could be improved. I remember being the first kid on my block who had "Pong" when it first came out, compliments of my uncle. Books, would appear in boxes for us to read as he was a huge proponent of reading and learning. He was as I have said to many, a larger than life figure that a kid without much of a father would cling to...and I did.

As I grew up and went to college, he would call and send money, challenge me to take difficult classes as they were "good for me", he told me that I should avail myself of all opportunities that would further my education and would check up on my to make sure that I was following his admonition.

After college, came graduate school, marriage, kids, and work. Redmond was there to help me in tough decisions and to encourage me when life threw me curve balls. He told me that no nephew of his should ever take the easy way out, and that if I did, I was missing the lesson that I should be learning.

I was able to visit him often because of my job. Traveling to Dallas almost once a month afforded us the chance to personally evaluate every steak house that we could find. We sampled cognac, scotch, and

beer in nice bars and holes in the wall alike. I cherished these times together and the many conversations on the phone as I drove home from work as we would talk about anything and everything. Politics, Games, Sports, Hunting, Fishing, foods worth eating, foods not worth eating, my children, who he called "the ducks" because of a mental picture of my wife as the mama duck leading our little brood around behind her. We talked like old friends, and like father and son.

In late 2004 Redmond suffered a heart attack. He lay on the floor of his bathroom for 6 hours before we found out what had happened. I was scared, and flew to see him and figure out what to do for him. We were told that he was going to be OK as long as he had bypass surgery and began taking his health seriously.

Well...Redmond was a hard headed Norwegian and I think that he was arrogantly too smart for his own good. He did not believe in modern medicine, he thought that he could take care of his heart homeopathically. He took a raft of pills that were supposed to improve heart health, blood flow, and other things, but he never went in to have the bypass.

I called him on the mat about this, he told me that he did not want the surgery. I offered to pay for everything, from insurance, the procedure, home health care, whatever, he said no. I realized that I was unable to do anything for my uncle other than to listen and love him.

Redmond showed some initial improvements, but nothing substantial. His heart got worse over time as he ignored the medical solution. I would call him every day on the way home from work again talking about everything under the sun, begging him to have the bypass surgery to no avail. I would visit, take him to dinner, but I could see that he was failing, this giant of a man was declining before me.

This was horrible for me to watch, here was the smartest person I have ever met, making what I thought were really poor choices with his life.

One of his friends called on March 7th, 2005 and told me that Redmond was in the hospital with another heart attack that was far worse than the first and that he was not expected to make it. I called my wife from work and she packed a bag for me. As I drove home I called my mom (his sister) and told her that we were needed in Dallas, and that I had bought a ticket for her that was waiting at her own airport. She flew in from Denver, and I from Minneapolis on the very next available flights and rushed to his bedside. My cousin and my aunt arrived the next day and we all sat with him and told him, told family stories, talked about what he wanted done with his estate, and finally we told him how much we loved him.

He lasted for another day, and on the 9th of March Redmond died with us at his side. I was able to use my cell phone to let my siblings and other cousins say goodbye. And then the one man who I looked up to and loved in this world just slipped away after telling me to take care of "the ducks".

I have never cried that much in my life, I cried until there were no more tears to cry. My friend, hero, and uncle was gone forever. My last words to him were to tell him that my wife was pregnant with our 5th child, and that it was a boy who we were going to name Matthew Redmond in his honor. He smiled a little wry grin and I could tell that he appreciated being remembered like that as he had never married nor did he have children.

Going through his things, I packed most of it up and shipped it to my house to deal with later. Several years ago, I found the watch that is pictured here in one of the boxes I sent back. I stuck a new battery in it and it and put a new strap on it and it started working. He never had a Patek Philippe, a Rolex, Breitling, Omega, or a Longines, he wore this Casio because it was accurate and cheap. This was the watch he was wearing when he had his last heart attack, and I have will be wearing it today to proudly remember my uncle.

I would like to encourage you to remember something from this too, if you are ignoring your health, don't. Don't be stubborn like Redmond was, it cost him his life. Indeed, one of the many fine doctors who cared for him told me that if Redmond would have done the bypass, he would have been around for another 10-15 years, or more. Your health is a gift folks, and your life is a gift to others, don't ignore that.

I would also like to say thank you to all of the health care providers who will read this, you are wonderful and caring people. So many nurses and doctors were so kind when we were there going through the horrible grief of losing him, they comforted him and us and I can't say thank you enough to all of you.

So today as you may see me around the SOB or the Capitol, know that it's been 10 years since Redmond has been gone and I miss him more than ever! It will be a bit of a hard day

At the same time I will also be proud to share with him (because I'm sure he's listening) that I'm doing the one other thing he asked me to do as he was dying, serve in office to make people's lives better, and to work hard to serve them, because in the hard work you will find the value.

Thanks for reading this.

Jim