

Christopher Simokat

January 31<sup>st</sup> 2006

I don't know how to start this or what to say. Other than my Uncle, Robert Foley Sr., has died. Sometime after he took my Grandmother out for dinner on Sunday and sometime before he was to go about his business on Monday afternoon. He died.

I mean I guess it shouldn't be a surprise. He was a big guy, a lot bigger than I am. Most of his heart had failed, he had a synthetic SA Node (Pacemaker), and he had an embedded defibrillator. Yet if you would have asked me I probably would have told you he was in okay health (sadly to say compared to many of us in the family he was on par).

My Aunt died almost two years ago, and I was very saddened by that. So much so that it was a great distraction for me and still is. I think about my Godmother/Aunt a lot. It reminds me about how little time I get to really spend with my family. They all live so far away excluding of course my immediate family, but even my Father lives quite a ways away, and before this I thought he was sounding tired and worn. Now I am truly afraid about what may happen to him and I don't want him to be all the way out there and not near me and my Sisters.

With my Aunt, however, we had known she was dying for a year before she actually died. I got to go out to New England I got to spend time with her, I got to say goodbye.

Not that we didn't have any idea that Robert could die, we're not stupid, but just all of a sudden. He is gone. I didn't even get to see him the last time I was out there. In fact the last time I saw him my Aunt was still alive.

You know I might not have gotten to see my Uncle all that often, but I do remember a lot about the times I did. Glazing over the vices and things that some people focused a lot on, and not to say they shouldn't but simply that I didn't view him in that light. Maybe I should have at some point especially more recently, but I do not, he is my Uncle and this is only how I think of him and will remember him: He had a very deep love for music. I remember him taking me to music festivals in Chicago (I particularly remember going to see the Blues Fest with him and my cousin John (who died when I was 16 and he was 23 or so) and the amazing time that was. That is one of the few moments where it felt like what I imagine normal family behavior is like.). He liked much of the same music I did, it really meant a lot to me to get to take him to Ozzfest 2001 in Worcester. I remember watching Black Sabbath with him, God that was such an amazing show. I mean that is probably my favorite Ozzfest (though I definitely have my affinity for Ozzfest 2000 (Kittie and Soulfly) as well). I mean the tour was almost over so there was all of that to be had, but I mean he had seen Black Sabbath many, many years ago and had his affections towards their music, and then fast forward and I got to take him and get him a front row seat to the show and I got to see it with him. I also remember sitting down in the basement of his house and listening to Tool and Stabbing Westward. I remember talking to him about music, how he experienced music, it was fascinating to me. He truly had a passion for music.

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My Uncle was also very smart, though he never went after higher education, I can recall one evening when I was working on some math homework, and I was becoming frustrated because I couldn't solve the problem. I believe it had something to do with a system of equations, I believe it was lines in a plane and determining if a given line was in the plane and if not what the angle between the line and the plane of the other lines was; so basically a Linear Algebra problem involving a system of equations (so determinants and dot and cross products and vector projections). I had hammered out a good chunk of the work already but something about the system of equations and manipulating them, maybe finding a point in common or parametrically defining them (can you tell yet I can't recall the details of this problem?), but I was having a problem with them, and he wanted to see what I was working on. So I gave him a copy of where I was frustrated and I had talked some ideas with him. I didn't really expect him to have an answer, but I figured maybe talking through the problem a bit would help me see what I was missing and get me through the problem. And he very quickly found a solution to the system of equations. That really amazed me. I mean I didn't think he was a dummy by any stretch of the imagination, but that really locked into me how bright he really was.

He loved food, obviously I mean he had a cardiovascular problem, how do you think you get one? But he did enjoy a lot of different foods. I probably would be a lot more close minded about the types of foods I'd be willing to try if it wasn't for him. And maybe a first response to that is "So what then you wouldn't be as overweight?", but I argue that my open mindedness and willingness to try new foods is analogous to my willingness to accept and desire to understand, learn, and live with other cultures that I am unfamiliar with. I'd probably be a lot more closed minded just in general if it wasn't for some of the roles he played in my life. However as an aside, my Mother and my Grandfather often comment that I eat like him (I do eat very quickly and I eat a sizable share), and I've known that to be quasi-problematic for awhile now, but now I'm more so afraid of it and uncertain as to whether it is too late for me to break my own patterns and escape his fate.

He enjoyed video games which I have many fond memories of playing games with my cousin John, Robert's son Robert, and with him. Maybe you think that's foolish or silly, but it is again another one of those glimpses into normalness that I'll never forget.

I also know that he loved his son, my Cousin Robert, so very much. He didn't get to spend as much time with him as he would have liked to, but he spoke of him very frequently, and the love he had for his son was well a Father's love for his son. I feel so awful for little Robert, I mean I may have suddenly lost my Uncle, but he has suddenly lost his Father. I don't know if there is anything I can do for him, I don't know what little Robert thinks/feels towards me since I've only seen him once or twice since he'd be old enough to remember me, but he now has to grow up with only memories of his Father and I just hope he can reflect and cherish positive memories and he remembers how much his Father did love him. I also hope that I'll be able to have some sort of positive role in Little Roberts life, maybe he will someday think of me in the kind/warm regard as I do my deceased Cousin John and my still living Cousin Christina.

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I also know that he loved me. He came out to Chicago a few times while I was growing up and always was very happy to see me when I was in New England. He hugged me and made me feel loved and apart of a family. I wish I could tell him that that's how he made me feel, and that I'm very thankful for his contributions to my growing up and life experiences.

I worry about my Grandparents who have lost yet another child. My Grandmother must be very confused, her Alzheimer's is pretty advanced and much of her understanding is obscured. I hope she can hold onto the memory of her son and enjoying the company of that last supper together. I am pretty sure she is the last person to have seen him alive.

My Grandfather has been fighting Leukemia for almost as long as I've been alive, that aside he is very lucid and in excellent overall health. I can't even imagine what goes on his mind, having to watch his children die. I wish I could be out there with him and comfort him.

Which leads me to that I again cannot make it to a family member's funeral, my Aunt died a week or so after I left and returned to Iowa. So I wasn't in a position to just jump back on a plane and return. Now academic obligations aside, our house is being actively remodeled, and someone has to be here to take care of that and take care of my younger Sister and keep her going in school and what not. Not to mention I'm not entirely sure how we're going to be able to afford sending my Mom out to New England, let alone anymore then just her. So again I miss the wake and the funeral mass. When my Aunt died a lot of my family came out to New England for her funeral, people who weren't there when she was dying. It makes me upset that I will miss those family members yet again and not have the chance to interact with them. I know so little about them, but I've always wanted to know more, and I do care about them, they are my family. I hope they know that, I hope they don't see something wrong with me not going out there again. I hope I can make time to see them and get to know them.

So this is my bit of writing for my Uncle. I wish he could read it, I wish I could have said goodbye. I promise I'll do what I can for your Son, and that I'll keep an eye on Grandpa and Grandma. Whenever I listen to or write music or as I engage in my research I promise to keep thoughts of your essence with me. To conclude here was my away message for today:

Goodbye my dear Uncle Robert. I'm going to miss you so much. I love you.

- Christopher

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Robert and I at Ozzfest 2001

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Little Robert and I the Thanksgiving after my Aunt died.