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COMMUNICATIONS WITH A PURPOSE

THOUGHTS

Going in style: “Ray’s ‘Live’ Wake” and the year after

This is a story in which death plays a part. I mention that up front in case you’re a little squeamish about the subject. Lots of people are, including me, but this is a story that deserves to be told. And it’s not really about death; it’s about life.

I met Ray Jutkins in the 1980s. He was presenting a program in New York City on how to make direct-mail advertising effective. The program was sponsored by the Direct Marketing Association and the US Postal Service. I liked what I heard. Ray and I talked at some length during the breaks.



“When Ray and I shared a podium in Salt Lake City to help them launch their direct marketing club, Ray drove his Harley right through the doors, down the aisle and up to the front ... got off of the cycle, and began his talk. The audience was astounded, but the local fire marshal had a fit when he heard that a motorized vehicle had been driven inside.” –Jerold L. Heisler

We went our separate ways – Ray back to Los Angeles, me back to Columbus. Being the marketer he was, Ray kept in touch. I’d get post cards with stamps from halfway around the world. The occasional marketing letter (this was before anyone had e-mail.) I bought his book and thought the company I worked for might hire him for a project. That never happened, but we continued to talk occasionally.

In the early ‘90s, when it became clear that the Internet, and particularly the Web would have an effect on the way the world would do business in the future, I sent Ray a letter. “You need a website,” I told him. His response was cool, but not cold. Something like, *Yeah, yeah. I tried Prodigy. Didn’t like it. Maybe someday. Not yet.* Not exactly one of the hottest prospects in the file.

But a couple of months later, I got a call. “I’m ready for a website,” Ray said. I said that was fine, but I was getting ready to leave for a speaking engagement in San Jose. “That’s OK,” Ray said. “I’m on my way out of here to speak in New York City.” By then, “here” for Ray was Rockingham Ranch, about 5 miles outside of Roll, Arizona, which is about 30 miles east of Yuma, which is about 300 miles from what, as Ray said, “some people think of as ‘civilization.’”

Rock, Roll, and the Internet

We both had e-mail addresses. With Ray in New York and me in San Jose, we cobbled together some ideas for what he thought would be a “postcard” website. It turned out to be a bit larger than that – around 1000 files by the time everything was said and done a decade later.

So Ray introduced me to the *virtual office* and we learned that it’s possible for people to collaborate easily on a project even if they’re not in the same room, the same building, or even the same country! When we returned to our respective homes, Ray sent e-mail, often 2 or 3 times a day. Sometimes from Arizona in the morning and Serbia in the afternoon. Toronto a day or two later and then Chicago.

More than once, Ray showed up on his Harley and if you examine a map, you’ll see that the distance between southwestern Arizona and central Ohio is not insignificant.

We worked on some projects together. We met each other’s

families. When I had a speaking engagement in San Diego, Ray insisted that I drive to *Rockingham Ranch*, stay for a couple of days, and enjoy. “**Enjoy**” was one of Ray’s favorite words, with the capital “J” in the middle. It’s a word he lived by.

In 2001, a problem surfaced

When Ray suddenly went silent, I suspected a problem, but messages from Nancy, his wife, seemed cheerful and normal. What I didn’t learn until later was that in late 2001 a physical exam revealed anemia. A second test confirmed it and the cause turned out to be leukemia. It was a particularly nasty kind of leukemia and it was out of control.

Ray started chemotherapy immediately and died twice during the ordeal. Literally. But the chemo got the leukemia under control and, in late summer 2002, he was well enough to ride his Harley to San Ysidro, California, just across the border from Tijuana, Mexico. From there, Ray and friend Gene rode 11,216 miles – to the Canadian border at Blaine, Washington, east to the spot where Maine touches New Brunswick, Canada, and then south to Key West, Florida. Cyclists know this as the “Four Corners” ride.

Ray looked healthy. Felt good. But he knew that leukemia would kill him. Some people would give up, but Ray wasn't about to take a death sentence seriously.

In the middle of 2003, Ray rode his Harley to Columbus for a meeting with the American Motorcycle Association. We got together for dinner. He was full of plans and looking healthy. He needed naps occasionally, Ray said, but everything seemed to be going well.

A few months later, near the end of 2003, the volume of e-mail messages from Ray dropped. He'd mentioned the possibility of moving back to California, so I hoped that he and Nancy were just busy packing.

January 31, 2004, Ray told me by e-mail that he needed to make a few changes to some of his e-zines and "there probably won't be any more when the current batch runs out in March." Oh, and would I be around because he wanted to talk with me by phone. Not e-mail, but phone. Today.

I would. We did.

Ray called at noon that day and, as if inviting me to join him for lunch, said *January has been pretty rough. My doctors say I probably have another 5 or 6 weeks. Oh, and I want to have a wake.*

What he had in mind was a live wake – one held while he was still alive, Ray said "Everybody gets to talk and make jokes at a funeral and everybody has a good time except for the dead guy." He decided on a New Orleans jazz funeral theme, except that it would be in Arizona. We laughed. How perfectly ordinary for Ray – wanting to **Enjoy** even his own funeral!

We set up a website for "Ray's 'Live' Wake", complete with some jazz clip-art. Ray provided a list of people to contact by e-mail. As sad as I felt about the news, Ray had made the event one to celebrate and enjoy.

Ray's "live" wake

The wake was amazing. I arrived at Ray's house, expecting to find him in bed. Or maybe in a wheel chair. I didn't expect to see a guy running around the house, supervising the 50 or so people who were helping to pack



everything for the move to California. He was a little weak, but you'd never have known it from the smile. Actually, he was probably a lot weaker, but he was also cheerful and full of life.

Everyone who walked in was handed a coffee mug with Ray's caricature and the slogan "I Survived Ray's 'Live' Wake." It's a mug I will cherish.

"Leukemia is a blessing," Ray claimed. He saw it this way: He knew what would kill him and he knew that the illness was not waiting patiently. But he also knew that he had an extra chance at life. A chance to spend more time with friends and family. He took advantage of every opportunity.

I mentioned earlier that during his intense chemotherapy, Ray died twice. During a particularly bad time in 2003, when he was involved in a clinical trial for an experimental drug, I was scheduled to speak at a conference in Tucson. Ray arranged to have a friend drive him to Tucson and we met at 6:30 one morning for breakfast. Ray was in no condition to be out of bed, much less out of the house at that time, but that's the kind of guy he was.

Ray appeared to be down for the count several times, but he kept bouncing back. And, despite his plans not to make any changes to the website, he kept sending copy for his e-zine.

A week before Christmas 2004, Ray sent an e-zine for the first week of January and his final e-zine. "When you get a call or an e-mail from Nancy," Ray wrote, "dig this out and use it."

The final word

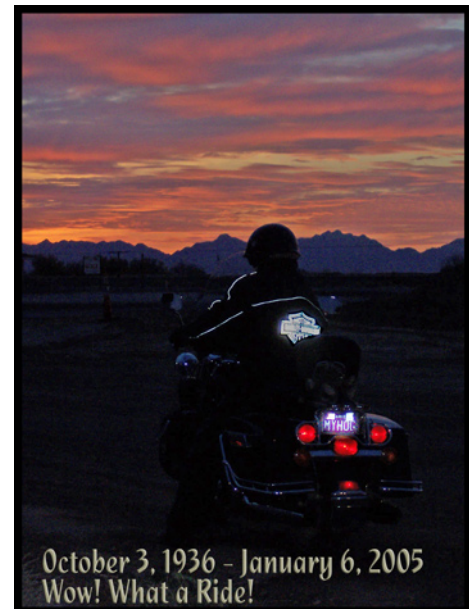
I wrote to Ray, "I've known you for nearly 20 years and Nancy for considerably less. I hope that if I ever have to face anything half as serious as what the two of you have faced that I'm able to do it with at least one third of the grace you have."

Ray disagreed, saying that what he and Nancy were doing was nothing out of the ordinary. On one level, perhaps that's true. We all will die. But when faced with death, Ray didn't avert his gaze. He looked death in the eye and gave the old buzzard quite a battle.

Excuse me if I disagree with him after the fact, but Ray Jutkins is an example of how not to let problems get in the way of enjoying life.

Ray died on January 6, 2005. I will miss him, but the lessons he taught me will live on.

Remember Ray Jutkins and ... Enjoy!



The photo above was taken by Ray's niece, Patty, when everyone left the motel for the moving-day convoy to California, the day after Ray's Live Wake. Ray may no longer be with us physically, but he did not go quietly into the night.

CORNER on the market by A.J. Stinnett

"Repetition is the foundation of precision in business planning."