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Remarks, delivered at the Memorial Service for Dick Lacks on May 18, 1999

Arend D. Lubbers
Grand Valley State University

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MEMORIAL SERVICE

FOR

DICK LACKS

MAY 18, 1999

I hope I do not presume too much when I say I speak on behalf of friendship because many of you were friends of Dick’s for longer than I. Old friends, boyhood friends, have ties and understandings that are exclusive. They have the root quality. But friendships developed later in life, even quite late, have their special characteristics too. They are like discoveries. They often bring new pleasures, new activities, a new special quality unexperienced before. After living a long time there is a new richness in your life because you have discovered a new friend. That was my feeling about Dick.

I was fortunate that our lives came together because he knew how to be a friend. He was open and emotionally sharing; he wanted what was best for you. There was no pretense in this. He really did. He could be critical and he could be praising. What you saw you got, and what you saw was an honest and generous man who at times could be boisterous.

I first met Dick in the men’s restroom at the Schnitzelbank. We had known about each other so it was easy to enter into repartee; a verbal sparring that carried through our friendship, gave us both pleasure, and led to a raucous moment or two.
The golf course, a rather sedate venue for sport, often erupted when Dick engaged the game. Colorful language sometimes followed his high arching shot off the right into the trees, and I smugly referred to the money that inevitably would move from his wallet to mine if he kept hitting shots like that. But it wasn’t the game that mattered so much as four hours of riding together in a golf cart. That was the time we really came to know about each other and our friendship took root.

Talking about all kinds of subjects; evaluating and proposing, you learned what was important to Dick. His Catholic faith was deep; his personal relationships with people who worked in the church easy and ongoing. I never saw much piety in the man. In fact, his earthiness is what I enjoyed, and after an outburst Jane would sometimes say, “Oh Dick,” or something like, “C’mon Dick,” followed by her high engaging laugh. I enjoyed that too.

I learned more about bumpers and grills than most university presidents need to know, but I learned about a highly competitive business. I learned about a close relationship between father and son. I learned about his love for his children and his loyalty and affection for family that extended to Jane’s family too. I learned about tough decisions he had made, and about disagreements and hesitations within the family and within the business—all transcended by those elements that combined to make him who he was. As I try to define the transcending qualities I see them as a kind of tribal loyalty, an elemental but not flaunting pride in what
had been built at Lacks Industries, personality that encompassed people; that wanted them together, not apart; a basic common sense that prevailed over emotion when decisions had to be made, and at the core a spirit of love no matter how gruffly or boisterously it was at times camouflaged.

Sometimes he could verbally take off after me, and when he was finished his mouth would form an almost elfish smile. He liked to say, when I entered a room, “Watch out! Hold onto your wallets! Here comes Lubbers!” All the while allowing me to take from his for some cause that was important for me. Most of you, his many friends, have had that or a similar experience. He would do a lot for friendship. He would do a lot for family. He would do a lot to maintain those relationships that gave his life the meaning and love that were essential to him.

I can cope with death at 90 years or even in the 80’s, but I feel a little resentment when I lose a friend younger than that. It’s really not a very healthy feeling I suppose, but we all know where it comes from. Dick was such a social person. He brought us all together. From him there will be no more calls for dinner, for joining him in Charlevoix or Marco, or on the boat. No more golf games with Dick and J.P. and the chance to take a few bucks because of the arching shots to the right. You can’t help miss a person who had so much life, activity and energy in him. The void his passing creates for Jane, and all of you in the family who never lived without him is large. I guess the only way to fill the
void and bank the resentment is to remember the fun, the activity, the love he had for family and friends. Memories enrich our lives. Dick provides a lot of material for enrichment.