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Eulogy for Guy Vander Jagt
by
Arend D. Lubbers
June 28, 2007

The headline reads, “Vander Jagt virtues: fund raising, oratory”. The writer forgot one word – friendship. Today we are here as friends, for Guy was a friendly man, and he gathered us to him. If anyone dismissed his friendliness as political technique, they were mistaken. He was genuine.

His affability carried with it a real desire for relationship with those considered greater or lesser, it didn't matter.

People mattered, friends mattered, family mattered. I have never known a person more involved in being human. He engaged in politics because it is the arena where human affairs hang out.

He came here to this place in 1949. He brought with him a gift, a God-given gift. He was hardly more than a boy

when he began to communicate from the public platform, displaying his unusual talent. From the beginning, his thought was clear, his vocabulary rich, and his voice mellifluous.

He maintained and honed this capacity. His thought matured, his vocabulary increased, and his voice never lost its smooth and honeyed quality. He can lay claim to being America's greatest orator in the last half of the 20th Century.

We, his classmates, were here, with him, at the beginning. He was quite a sensation on campus with his speeches and his ability to debate. Hope College has an oratorical heritage, and he is the star in that long tradition. We knew when his professor, Dr. William Schrier, and Guy were on the contest circuit. We awaited the phone call bearing the results. When Guy won first in the National Oratory

contest, the campus celebrated. It was a victory for all of us. During his college years he was a winner in another category. He was known for having the messiest room, but that is another story.

One's ability to speak is on public display, one's intellectual development that determines what one says, is more private. Guy's college years coincided with what I choose to call a "period of enlightenment" at Hope, spurred by some challenging faculty and a large number of returning veterans and smart college agers, including Guy, who accepted the faculty challenge. There was intellectual ferment. The condition was formative. It directed intellectual and spiritual development, and led to personal friendships among those who participated in it. To know Guy fully, to know the mind and spirit that were reflected in all his enterprises, you must be aware of the profound

effect this period had on his life. The endowed Vander Jagt Chair at Hope, his friends from college days, and the service in this chapel attest to that.

The pursuit of theological education, the law degree, the political career, evolved naturally from the engagement and involvement he had in college. His goals and ambitions were not fully defined, but he began to find his track, where his special talent could lead to success.

Guy did not marry in college or shortly after graduation as did so many of our generation. Avoiding this holy estate for several years, his timing on entering it was propitious.

His choice was fortunate. To fall in love with someone who is good for you is one of life's greatest blessings, and Guy was so blessed. The room would be put in order, the T's that needed a cross and i's that needed dots would have them. Two high intelligences would combine to make for

Guy a political career of national significance, an enviable personal life, and Ginny who proves their intelligence by her own.

Everyone here has a Guy story. He connected to more people in a month during the height of his public career than many do in a lifetime. He drew strength from the connections. He wanted to be admired. He wanted approval, but he knew how to give approval and to admire. He played in the national and international game, but he appreciated the game on the home field where most of us play. His human interest had no boundaries.

Though I was on the periphery of his political career, I observed three characteristics that qualify for permanent publication in the rule book for political life. He was ambitious. You have to be if you want to climb the political ladder, but his ambition was always trumped by

his humanity. He was loyal. Once he had a relationship with you, you never had to reestablish yourself with him. He had an integrity safety net. All politicians make deals; they maneuver, they say what they know constituents want to hear. The bigger the game, the higher the stakes. Some seem never to know or believe that there is a limit. Guy had clearly defined limits. He never sacrificed integrity. He had a safety net called character.

Seventy-five used to be old. Not anymore. That is why this closing is difficult. There was more fun in the future. I want to hear his stories told with a flourish. I want to share bottles of white wine, table revelry at one of Carol's feasts. There are more hymns to sing around the piano, and golf to play by Guys rules at the Cadillac Country Club.

When we first began playing golf together, I asked him for his score on the first hole to record on the scorecard. He

said, "Par." I said, "You didn't have a four." He replied, "No, a five." I said, "That's not par." "Oh", he said, "It's a Guy par", and then he laughed. He made life suit his sense of what was pleasing and reasonable.

Guy had greatness. His vision and achievement revealed it.

Yet among us he lived as a friend.