

Please bear with me, in Randy's 8th grade speech class we never got to the chapter on delivering eulogies to a thousand people. As many of you know, that class consisted largely of watching Lynard Skynard concerts and Michael Jordan's 'Come Fly With Me' video. I made an A.

My name is Luke Gilliam, China Spring Class of '94, I've known Randy for half my life. Before I get started, I would like to thank Jill and the entire Leasley family for asking me to speak today. It is a tremendous honor. But I am merely the voice of everyone in this building who has something great to say about Randy. I hope each of my stories and memories reminds you of a pleasant one of your own.

I laughed coming down here Sunday as my wife Jennifer was on the phone trying to explain why she wouldn't be at work Monday. She said, "Luke's high school basketball coach, well, he was his coach, but also his friend. It's kind of hard to explain. He was his coach and his friend, but he was much more than that."

I thought that was pretty apropos. Randy was kind of hard to put into a category. For most of us in here, he was a teacher, a coach, and a friend. But he was also much more than that.

My first exposure to Randy was in that 8th grade speech class. Randy still loved to tell the story about my seven-minute demonstration speech on how to get dressed for a football game. He said after the demonstration that my jock strap was one false move from getting me kicked out of school.

Randy was a teacher, but he was much more than that.

I began playing basketball for Randy as a freshman. I would dare say I spent more time in the gym that season than any other player...but not by choice. At the end of every practice we would run horses for every missed free throw. In addition to being a terrible free throw shooter, I was incredibly slow. That's a bad combination.

You had 36 seconds to run each horse or it didn't come off your tab. I probably owed, on average, about six horses a day. I would always try to get about four done after practice, then Randy would let me show up before school the next morning at 7:30 to run last two. In those afternoon practices, stopwatch in hand, he could see me start to get tired on that third or fourth one and try to inspire me with these words, which I will never forget...34, 35, 36, 7:30. I considered it the ultimate irony and test of my will power that after running all week, Randy brought donuts when he opened the gym Saturday mornings.

I think Randy and me hit it off for a couple of reasons that winter when I was 14. First, I typified the short, unathletic, poor shooting type of player he somehow molded into a winner. And, I was born the same year as the Cutlass. We're both 76 models.

My poor free throw shooting led me to my first ride in Randy's prized Oldsmobile Cutlass when Randy took me home after practice one day. For those of you who have never seen the Cutlass, its part automobile, part battleship. It's about 25 feet long. From the driver's seat, you need binoculars to see the hood ornament. The Cutlass has carpet on the dash and on the inside it smells of coconut incense

and popcorn. We've had five presidents since Randy bought that car, but it's still in immaculate condition.

That's a side of Randy I don't think a lot of people know about. Despite the laid-back demeanor, Randy was a neat-freak. The man organized his organizers. I went to his office Monday for what I thought would be hours of research trying to figure up how many games he won at China Spring. Instead, I merely opened the file cabinet and there were the stats and records for every team he had coached, color-coded by year.

It was during that research that I discovered that I rewarded Randy's patience with my free throw shooting my freshman year by shooting 52 percent from the free throw line as a senior. Even somebody that cheated to get through Coach Dyer's algebra class knows that's barely half my free throws.

But the funny thing was, Randy never remembered the free throws you missed. I loved it when he'd tell the story about me making two free throws at the end of a game to send everyone in Clifton back to their trailer park in a bad mood. That was the joy of Randy. The guy was just so positive and had a way of making you feel like gold. Randy was a coach, but he was more than that.

In my sportswriting career, few have rivaled Randy in what we like to call quotability. After the Coogs turned the ball over about six million times to La Vega in a loss one night, Randy told me, "Their defense was like Piranhas and we kept throwing chum in the water." That was the joy of Randy. He could make you laugh no matter how bad things were going for him.

I called Randy Saturday afternoon. I had a basketball game on TV, I was listening to a little Cross Canadian Ragweed, and I had some BBQ on the grill. I was thinking that he was probably doing the same thing.

That's one of the things I loved most about Randy. He was consistent. Think hard about the last time you saw Randy in a bad mood. He loved getting together and swapping lies and stories.

With Randy, it was always, "On Like Donkey Kong." I still have no idea what that means, but it always made me laugh when he said it.

Coach had some stories now. He told you most of them five times. That was the joy of Randy. Not so much in hearing a story that you'd already heard, but watching Randy get excited telling the story with you dodging a little flying spit if you were sitting too close.

Randy was a friend, but he was much more than that.

Maybe that's why this hurts so much. It wasn't cancer. It wasn't the high blood pressure that had him popping pills like they were aspirin after Shane Carpenter threw another pass into the third row of the bleachers. It wasn't the bad knees that made him walk like the tin man from the Wizard of Oz.

Randy was fond of saying he liked to hang out with us because it kept him young. Truth is, it was the other way around.

The man was an institution. It's always been my contention that China Spring is a special place. Randy is one of the people that made it that way. He was a big believer in Cougar Pride.

Coach had a zest for life that we can all envy. He packed a lot of living into 52 years. He was fond of saying, "I didn't come to the World Series to bunt." Not exactly "Carpe Diem", but very typically Randy.

Randy was an old man that didn't act like it. Randy was an old man that went on road trips. Randy was an old man that could name every song on an oldies station before the first word. Randy was an old man that could roll out of bed and make eight out of 10 free throws...in the dark. Randy was an old man that put together summer basketball leagues and didn't care that he lost money doing it. Randy was an old man that wore Chuck Taylor Converse shoes and drove a cool car. Randy was an old man that made candles and cooked great BBQ. Randy was an old man that loved his daughter with all his heart. Those were the joys of Randy.

As we all know, Randy could quote you chapter and verse from any band from A to Z, Ambrosia to Zeppelin. So I'll close with one of his favorite passages from The Book of the Allman Brothers.

Lord, I was born a ramblin' man

Trying to make a living and doing the best I can

When it's time for leaving, I hope you'll understand

That I was born a rambling man

The games will go on.

The songs will still play.

But the music will never sound the same.

I love you Coach