

Randall Schmit

I met Randy when we were 14 years old, both dreaming about ways to spend our lives in service of God, the Church and other people. We attended St. John's High school seminary together and developed a fast and close friendship because that's the kind of guy Randy was. We shared similar interests in faith, family, music, humor and pizza - as well as a few other high school-related things that we need not go into right now. Suffice to say that he introduced the fine patrimony of Milwaukee into our recreational activities. I got to meet his terrific parents, who introduced me to the Catholic charismatic renewal and a quiet, confident approach to the Christian life. Newly ordained, I came to St. Elizabeth's, and Jenny made me this chasuble that I'm wearing today. Randy and I graduated in a class of twelve. Six of us went on to the college seminary. After a year, Randy discerned other ways to serve God, the Church and other people. And he excelled. He continued to pour out his love for his family and his friends. He had a gift for fixing things, whether it was cars or people. And he enjoyed using that gift.

He changed the oil on my Volkswagen and even taught me how to do it. One day I needed a more complicated repair on my car, so he grabbed a tool kit, came outside, went to work, figured out the problem, and got my car running again. I said, "I'm just amazed you can do this." What he said to me next was a lesson I have carried all my life. It defined Randy in many ways. It showed his awareness of his gifts, his humility, his charity, and a matter-of-fact approach to life that inspired more deeply than he could fully appreciate. We were probably still in our early 20s that day, when, standing at my car newly running again, receiving my compliment on his work, Randy looked down at the kit by his feet, then back up at me and said this: "You can do anything if you use the right tools."

God gifted Randy with some amazing tools: knowledge about how things worked, a readiness to hear people's problems, and a hunger for the meaningful satisfaction that comes when you make someone else's life better because you shared your gift. Even though Randy was sick for so long, illness never defined his life. Perseverance, joy, helping people - those traits defined Randy.

It is hard to lose a guy a like this. We loved him, and we put him to use. It was hard to watch Randy decline. He's been suffering for many years, though you wouldn't have known it to look at him. It's comforting to say his suffering is at an end. It's comforting to hear these words from the Book of Wisdom: "The souls of the just are in the hand of God.... As gold in the furnace, he proved them, and ... took them to himself." And these words from First Thessalonians: "through Jesus, [God will] bring with him those who have fallen asleep." Those words make us feel better about Randy, but these words may make us feel uneasy about ourselves: "I was hungry and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me." You see, God has given each one of us a tool kit, and every so often, in the guise of a friend or a stranger in need, Christ appears, asking us to use our tools in service of God, the Church and other people. We do not always excel. But at least we have the example of those who did.

The grief we feel today uncovers the love we've long held for a guy who showed us a path to a meaningful life. May Randy hear these words this day: "Come, you who are blessed by my father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

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