

GOOD MORNING:

My name is Rosemary Johnston. I am Joe's niece, the eldest child of his eldest sister, Rita Lorraine Robinson Masterson. On behalf of Mary Ann and Joe's surviving siblings and family members, I would like to welcome all of you to this celebration of Joe's life.

Before I begin my formal remarks, I would like to thank those of you who were able to be most present to Joe and Mary Ann during the weeks before his death. These people include Joe's brother, Tom Robinson and his wife Pat, neighbor Trudy Fletcher, longtime friends Rick and Lenora Kneeshaw who frequently brought him communion and the hospice nurses who provided such excellent care and support---Edna Decano, Malu Lucaba, and Pines Navarro, and to all of you who had an opportunity to visit with him during that time. Most of all, we are all grateful to Mary Ann for making the arrangements that enabled Joe to die at home, surrounded by the people and the things that he loved, including the bird feeder and fountain just outside his bedroom balcony where he could watch birds bathe and feed from his bed. And please join us for a luncheon reception at the conclusion of today's liturgy at our home. There are directions on the green sheets at the back of the church.

I lived with Joe and Mary Ann during my freshman year at the University of San Diego, and I remember a plaque that was posted on the wall of the bedroom where I slept. It read, "A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops." Both Joe and Mary Ann were dedicated teachers, and I recognize the truth of that statement as I

reflect on the teachers who made a difference in my own life and the hours outside the classroom that Joe and Mary Ann set aside to correct papers, prepare lesson plans, and complete projects for their students. Yet I think that truth holds true for anyone who makes a positive difference in the lives of others. And Joe did that from the time he was a child growing up in Acushnet, Massachusetts with his six siblings and his mother, who struggled to keep the family together after her marriage failed just before the Great Depression began.

Joe was the one who introduced his brother Tom to the wonders of the woods outside their home in Acushnet. While the older children—Lorraine, Patricia and Jim—were kept occupied with numerous household tasks and much homework, Joe and Tom were old enough to play in the woods alone while the youngest two—Rosemary and Mike—remained at home with the older siblings.

Listen to this narrative written by my Uncle Tom in Anneville, his memoir of life for the Robinson family during the Great Depression:

*The stone walls that bordered the woods were a haven for most of the small creatures of the countryside: every variety of crawling insect, mice, rats, chipmunks, squirrels, snakes, rabbits, foxes, woodchucks, skunks and birds of all varieties. The stone wall was also a great place for every kind of vine, creeper, or bramble to grow. Joe had learned all of this and passed the knowledge on to Tom... Tom had never known anything like the contentment and peace he felt in the dark recesses of this mini-wilderness. It stirred*

*something in him even more profound than that which he felt during early morning Christmas Mass at St. Francis Xavier Church .As they went deeper into the woods, Joe stopped talking. Above them was a canopy of hardwood trees—maples, oaks, chestnuts, beeches and elms..and the air was filled with birdsongs. Joe stopped and held up his hand. “Listen!” he whispered, that’s a scarlet tanager. If you look, you might get a peek at him. There! Up in the maple. Keep your eyes peeled. I hear an oriole and a bluebird too.*

So the woods provided a healthy outlet for Joe and Tom and the other siblings, a break from the difficulties they encountered growing up poor especially during those Cape Cod winters. There were times when the Robinsons had no electricity and precious little fuel for heat. Joe and my mother contracted diphtheria, and the whole town knew the Robinsons depended on the charity of the town council to get by. Nonetheless they all excelled in school, and thanks to Gertrude Robinson’s Catholic faith and gritty determination to keep the family together, they made it through the Depression without any major tragedies.

Joe had started junior high school but, like his older sister Lorraine and brother Jim, he decided to quit school and help support the family. He enlisted in the Army in 1945, following in the footsteps of his brother Jim, but soon after the war ended he found himself in San Diego where he was soon joined by his mother, my mother, and the two youngest –Rosemary and Mike—who were still in high school at the time.

Joe worked in electronics at North Island Naval Station and began studying to complete his high school diploma. It was during this time that he met and married Mary Ann Loss, the love of his life for almost six decades. He enrolled at San Diego State University and earned his bachelor's degree and teaching credential there in 1958.

Joe taught briefly at Lincoln High but spent most of his 30 year teaching career at Point Loma High School. He was known as Joe Cool by his students and returned their love for him in full measure as an exemplary teacher and confidante.

As many of you know, Joe had a wonderful sense of humor and was a consummate storyteller. Even on his deathbed, his sense of humor remained intact. Recently, when Rick and Lenora stopped by to bring him communion, Tom was visiting Joe and said: "I'll step out to the living room so you can have some privacy while you receive communion." Joe responded without missing a beat: "Yes, please. No sinners allowed." His trademark dimples punctuated a life full of laughter and good times, often shared by those around him. His favorite stories often involved the antics of the students at Point Loma High. Here is a thumbnail sketch of my top three Joe Robinson stories.

*One year during graduation ceremonies, a group of students decided to streak across the football field dressed only in their birthday suits. A young coed was last in line but she was unable to scale the chain link fence to escape the school security guards who were in hot pursuit. While the crowd cheered the streakers on, the principal and dignitaries present grew more and more red faced. Finally, one of the security guards caught up with the naked coed, threw his jacket over her shoulders and escorted her off the field.*

*On another occasion, the Friday before the Veterans Day holiday, the students gathered in the stands for a Veterans Day ceremony. The student trumpet players performed the traditional taps melody, then added a jazzy riff at the end of it. Again the crowd roared, and the principal and military dignitaries present appeared outraged.*

*Another time, on the Friday before Memorial Day weekend, the students stood up in the stands as the high school ROTC members began their 21 gun salute. As if on cue, a number of students fell to the ground, one by one, as though they had been hit by gunshot. Initially, there was concern, then everyone joined in the laughter except, of course, the principal and other dignitaries who did not think their antics were a bit funny.*

Joe also loved to tinker and enjoyed browsing at swap meets on the weekend, looking for that special something he did not know he needed until he learned how little it cost! He had not one but two sheds built at his cabin to accommodate his tools, pipe, wire, nails, screws, fixtures, and other items he just knew would come in handy someday.

Joe and Mary Ann shared a love for the outdoors. Nature was his cathedral. The backyard of their dream home in Del Cerro with its sweeping views to the west became a virtual haven not only for birds but for rabbits, squirrels, foxes, coyotes, and small reptiles who sensed this yard was a place for all of God's creatures, great and small. They purchased their first cabin in Pine Valley early in the 1970s but sold it not long after they had bought the 150 year old log cabin on Palomar that was their weekend home for 30 years.

Joe constructed innumerable bird feeders and bird houses and often climbed the trees himself to install them until Mary Ann convinced him to let others do the climbing. He kept his feeders filled with a variety of bird food to attract hundreds of birds who lived on the mountain or migrated over it during the fall and spring. He often invited the Audobon Society to visit their cabin and just sit and watch the birds in the nearby trees, feeders, and water fountains. He and Mary Ann also became active in the Friends of Lake Murray where he built nesting boxes and feeding boxes for peregrine, osprey, and wood ducks. While he excelled in identifying various species not only by their appearance but by the sound of their chirp, Mary Ann began to develop her skill as an outdoor photographer who photographed birds from inside a blind next to their cabin pond. At times, when Joe would contact the Natural History Museum or the San Diego Zoo or the Audobon Society to report a rare bird, he would sometimes meet with doubt until his description or her photos confirmed his initial identification.

Joe greatly enjoyed the years following his retirement from teaching almost 20 years ago. He was in excellent health most of his adult life and he made friends easily, whether they were neighbors in Del Cerro or Palomar or those who joined him in his daily walks at Grossmont Center. He was a gracious host when Mary Ann's sister Marge moved in with them for a few years before her death almost two years ago. An avid reader, he rose before dawn every day to watch the reflection from the sunrise light up the western sky outside his living room with the requisite cup of fresh coffee nearby.

And he loved music. He never played an instrument, but his musical tastes were eclectic, ranging from classic composers and operas to the latest contemporary tunes. When I lived with them that freshman year, the first sound I would hear on waking up would be Joe singing or whistling a tune.

In his best seller, Tuesdays with Morrie, author Mitch Albom records Morrie's philosophy about living, loving, and dying:

*As long as we can love each other, and remember the feeling of love we had, we can die without ever really going away. All the love you created is still there. All the memories are still there. You live on—in the hearts of everyone you have touched and nurtured while you were here...death ends a life, not a relationship.*

So remember, whenever you sit with a fresh cup of coffee and watch as the morning sun gilds the eastern sky, there you will find Joe.

Whenever you gaze in awe at the acrobatic flight of the cliff swallow or the whirlwind motion of a hummingbird drawing nectar from a flower, there you will find Joe.

Whenever you hear the sound of the acorn woodpecker boring a hole in the side of a tree or the cooing of a mourning dove, there you will find Joe.

Whenever you step outside on a brisk morning and inhale deeply the air in the woods or mountains, there will you find Joe.

Whenever you know the pleasure of teaching others about history, about nature, or about lessons to be learned about life and relationships, there you will find Joe.

Whenever you enjoy a favorite piece of music, whether it is performed live or from a recording or if you sing or whistle it to yourself, there you will find Joe.

And whenever you love or are loved like the love described in today's readings, there you will find Joe.

We will never know where his influence stops.