

Eulogy for Kevin Beirne Barrett

Who was Kevin Barrett? Kevin was a big guy with a big heart who heard the call of others and gave his time freely to help. He was many different things to many different people. He touched people in all walks of life from the local laborers to the corporate board room. That was one of his many gifts-- Kevin could relate to people.

Kevin was a natural leader-- a leader who lead by example. He worked harder, did more and expected less but most of all he had integrity and a sense of fairness that people naturally trusted.

And he could talk.... Man could he talk. He had that special gift of the Irish-- His stories had more humor, more depth and more color. When Kevin talked, people listened.

Kevin was a good brother and a good son. He cared for his aging parents with love and devotion. His best friends were his wife and then his siblings. That speaks for itself. I am sure they will have something to say about that.

Kevin was an outstanding father. Spend time with Sam or Abby and that would be obvious. His love for his wife never faded. Loyalty and devotion ran deep in his veins.

We had a big family, 32 cousins 11 aunts and uncles on his mothers side and the calls came often for help. Mow a field, buy a calf, fix a barn, repair a tractor, borrow a gun, venison for the table, and on and on. Kevin gave freely of his time and energy never asking for something in return.

And it wasn't just about family, Kevin helped strangers too. It was Christmas in the late 1970's a heavy snow fall when Santa Claus pulled a family car out of a ditch by using his 4 wheel drive sleigh, or so the local paper reported. I always wondered where he got a red suit big enough to fit him.

Far be it for me to try and define or encapsulate who Kevin was here in just a few minutes, but I can tell you how he touched my life.

I first came to know Kevin about 35 years ago during my unbridled youth. My exasperated father sent me to live with Kevin for summers during my teens. He figured who better to reach a testosterone driven maniacal teenager than a bigger maniac with better manners-- and Kevin answered the call. So I, at age 15 moved into his bachelor pad-- Just what every single 25 year old wants. That was the start of relationship that changed my life.

Kevin was my cousin by blood but realistically he was the brother I never had. He validated my unbridled spirit and became a kindred soul. He was a teacher, a confidant and a friend. He taught me lessons that carried me through the hardest times of my life.

He taught me many things but first and foremost was how to work, and work me he did. Bale that hay, milk the cows, feed the calves, rain or shine, healthy or sick-- the work goes on-- no excuses. I carried that lesson with me through college, medical school and today in my medical practice. That lesson has saved lives.

And I learned--- about guns, mechanics, tractors, milk, hay fields, fertilizer, motorcycles.... and not to try and sneak a piece of bacon off his plate unless you are ready to take a beating..... and I learned how to take a beating.... and then go back to work. I teased him about it years later and wonder if he ever knew how much that lesson helped me treat my terminal patients and then go on to see the next patient. Back to work, milk the cows, no excuses.

As a young man, Kevin taught me self respect, generosity, fairness, and to answer the call of the people who need you, and he taught me with dignity, a big heart and sometimes a big fist.

Kevin showed me amazing things: how to fly a plane, the mountain top view on a clear day, how to turn a breech calf during birth, how to artificially inseminate a cow.

He also showed me some not so amazing things-- like the inside of a manure spreader-- But Kevin was fair-- he threw me in feet first.

Rainy days on the farm were my favorite. More time for play. Occasionally we went to the livestock auction and Kevin taught me how to pick out the best cows, something I like to remind my wife of often. It seemed appropriate, that Kevin should be the best man at my wedding. And again he answered the call and flew for 2 days to meet us on a small island in the Bahamas. Luggage lost, no clothes, he knew only me and he didn't miss a beat. Most popular guy there-- my friends and the hotel staff still talk about him. All my close friends knew of him before he arrived.-- unassuming man that he was, he was not comfortable with their accolades.

Over 35 years Kevin always answered my call. To me he was a big bright lighthouse that helped guide me to safe harbor in the storms of my life. And he always answered with smart pragmatic solutions. I will miss him and his advice.

You see, I have always felt a debt to Kevin for the validation and education he gave me as a young man. I later learned that just like a kindred spirit, a broken spirit could have lasted a life time but Kevin answered the call and saved me from that fate. And last Tuesday night as I struggled to try and repay that debt, his life slipped away before my eyes. He had answered yet another call-- the final call-- this one from God.

After his passing I sat outside the hospital for quite some time stunned and confused. I really did not know what to do. But turned to my wife and said "I know what Kevin would say-- what's done is done and there is nothing you can do about it now so get back to work." Milk the cows, no excuses. Even in death his light house guides me to safe harbor-- For that I am forever grateful.

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