

WHEN I WAS THINKING OF WHAT I WANTED TO SAY ABOUT MIKE TODAY, I REALIZED THAT OVER THE LAST 45 YEARS WE HAD COVERED A LOT OF GROUND TOGETHER.

WE FISHED, HUNTED AND GOLFED OVER SEVERAL STATES AND INTO CANADA. BACK "IN THE DAY" WE DROVE FAST CARS AND ATTENDED A FEW SOCIAL EVENTS IN THE LATE 70'S AND EARLY 80'S. WE HAD A LOT OF FUN. AS I RAPIDLY APPROACH 60, I'M SURE I'VE FORGOTTEN SEVERAL OF THE STORIES THAT COULD BE TOLD.

WE ROOMED TOGETHER FOR A YEAR, RAISED FAMILY'S TOGETHER AND MIKE LET ME HELP HIM COACH AN UNDEFEATED MIGHTY MITE FOOTBALL TEAM THAT HIS SON DEREK AND MY SON WERE ON. DEREK'S CLASS WENT ON TO BE UNDEFEATED THROUGH THEIR FRESHMAN YEAR. I'M SURE THE MIDDLE SCHOOL AND FRESHMAN COACHES BENEFITTED FROM MIKE'S KNOWLEDGE OF THE GAME.

MIKE TAUGHT ME HOW TO PLAY GOLF BUT I RARELY SCORED AS LOW AS HE DID. OCCASSIONALLY I WOULD ACCUSE HIM OF NOT TEACHING ME EVERYTHING HE KNEW ABOUT THE GAME. HE WOULD JUST SMILE, TAKE MY MONEY AND REMIND ME HE HADN'T CHARGED ME FOR LESSONS "IN THE BEGINNING"

MIKE LOVED TO FISH AND HE WAS GOOD AT IT. HE WAS ALSO GOOD AT FALLING OUT OF BOATS. I'VE SEEN MIKE FALL OUT OF CANOES IN THE SUMMER, GIGGING BOATS IN THE WINTER, BASS BOATS AND PONTOONS.

MIKE, STEVE AND I FLOATED SAC RIVER FOR WHITE BASS ONE SPRING. THE RIVER WAS UP AND WE WERE MOVING RAPIDLY WHEN THE BOAT LODGED AGAINST A LOW HANGING TREE ADORNED WITH LIMB LINES AND LARGE HOOKS. MIKE DECIDED TO STEP FROM THE BOAT TO THE TREE. 250 PLUS POUNDS MOVING FROM A SMALL BOAT TO A PARTIALLY SUBMERGED TREE MAKE SEVERAL THINGS HAPPEN RAPIDLY. AS I RECALL IT WENT LIKE THIS: MIKE FALLS FROM HIS PERCH OF ONE FOOT ON THE TREE AND ONE FOOT IN THE BOAT THE BOAT GOES UNDER STEVE IS DODGING BIG HOOKS IN THE TREE I GO UNDER AT WHICH POINT I LOSE TRACK OF STEVE I SURFACE ABOUT 20 FEET DOWNSTREAM THE BOAT SURFACES BESIDE ME I SEE STEVE CLINGING TO A TREE LIMB NO MIKE I LOOK AROUND STILL NO MIKE THEN ABOUT 50 FEET DOWNSTREAM UP POPS MIKE FISHING ROD IN HAND AND HE STARTS GRINNING.

MIKE KNEW HOW TO HAVE FUN AND HE HAD THE ABILITY TO DELIVER ONE LINERS THAT WOULD JUST CRACK YOU UP. MANY YEARS AGO MIKE, DIANE, STEVE, LORI, MONA AND I WERE RETURNING FROM A TRIP TO TENNESSEE. WE HAD STOPPED AT A RESTAURENT IN JONESBOROUG ARK. TO EAT AND IN WALKS MONA'S EX HUSBAND JOE. AT THE TIME JOE AND I WERE NOT ON THE BEST OF TERMS AND MIKE WAS AWARE OF THIS FACT. OVER TO OUR TABLE WALKS JOE AND AS MONA IS INTRODUCING HIM BEFORE SHE COULD SAY MIKE'S NAME. MIKE STOOD UP LEANED FORWARD AND WITH A STRAIGHT FACE AND IN HIS BEST GODFATHER VOICE SAID "GUIDO". JOE IMMEDIATELY EXCUSED HIMSELF. BUT WE RUINED THE MOMENT BY BUSTING OUT IN LAUGHTER BEFORE HE GOT OUT OF THE RESTAURENT.

WHILE I MAY HAVE FORGOTTEN SOME OF THE THINGS WE DID TOGETHER OVER THE YEARS, I WILL ALWAYS ADMIRE MIKE'S DEDICATION TO HIS FAMILY. I WILL NOT FORGET THAT MIKE WAS THE KIND OF MAN THAT WHEN HE SAID "I'VE GOT YOUR BACK" YOU NO LONGER WORRIED ABOUT THAT DIRECTION AND I WILL NEVER FORGET THE BLESSING HIS FRIENDSHIP HAS BEEN TO MY LIFE.