

Memories of Michael



*Michael Joseph Rainaldi
5 April 1969 to 8 January 2003
Orlando, Florida*

Dear Michael,

You have had years of pain – emotionally and physically. There have been countless visits to doctors and hospital emergency rooms. Your body has been attacked by one ailment after another, yet you remain vigilant.

I admire your strength.

When I have a sore throat, I whimper, and cry out for my mamma. If I were in your shoes, I don't know what I would do.

I admire your courage.

All of life's trials and tribulations are part of a journey – an adventure of corporeal experiences that the spirit has chosen. My spirit chose an easier path than yours.

I admire your bravery.

You are so gentle, loving, kind, thoughtful, caring, and generous.

I love you so "Berry," "Berry" much!

– Dan

MICHAEL'S PAGE

This was the dedication page in a cook book that we were publishing to be sold at a benefit in February for Michael. It was written by his mom, Linda...

"This book is dedicated with love to my son, Michael, who has shown us all that we may not be able to control what happens to us in life, but we can control how we handle it.

He has shown us that, regardless of what problems we have been given, someone else has been given even more to deal with. Michael has shown his family that things turn out best for the people who make the best of the way things turn out."

THANK YOU MICHAEL,
Dan, Mom, Gram, Jason, Christi, Ashlynn, A.J.

Gram: "Michael.. My first grandchild. He was a light in my life while he lived and now he remains a light in my heart forever. I love you Mike."

January 8, 2003

BASE Camp Board of Directors, Family, Volunteers, and Friends:

My dear, dear friend, Michael Rainaldi died this morning at Shands Hospital in Gainesville, Florida. Mr. Mike, as he was known by 15 years of BASE Camp Kids, was 33 years old and had been battling a very rare diagnosis of autoimmune hepatitis for 15 years. Mike found BASE Camp, before it was BASE Camp, as STARLIGHTERS in 1987. He was 18 years old and could not find a support group in the Central Florida area for his illness and somehow found us. He immediately became a hit with the kids and became one of my most loyal and reliable chaperones.

I have many wonderful memories of Mike and know many children who he personally helped along their journey. One night near midnight we wrote the names of children who had died in the sand on Daytona Beach. He did this along side children who knew they too would join this list soon. Mike knew that his illness would someday most likely take his life as well. But he joined our mission in making a difference and trying to have fun.

Mike went on to volunteer for the Leukemia Society, the American Cancer Society Rock Camp, and Boggy Creek Gang Camps. He loved children and especially loved children who needed a special "buddy" who understood their appearance or their sadness.

Mike has continued to volunteer for BASE Camp, even attending the December 2002 overnight camp and help me get the pizzas and sodas for our monthly pizza party. Mike was actually scheduled to help me deliver leftover Holiday Gifts today for the children who were unable to attend our Christmas Party in December. Throughout his illness he found ways to stay connected to BASE Camp and help in whatever ways he could.

Moments after learning of his passing, I had a wonderful feeling of peace and a vision of Mike as I first met him—young and healthy, smiling bright and beautiful. Mike will be missed by many. I count myself among those who will miss him most.

Terri Jones
Executive Director
BASE Camp Children's Cancer Foundation
www.basecampccf.org

Subject: A note from a family about Mr. Mike
Date: 01-09-2003 3:03:29 PM Eastern Standard Time

Forwarded Message:

Subject: Michael Rainaldi, 5 April 1969 - 8 January 2003
Date: 01-09-2003 10:53:26 AM Eastern Standard Time
From: vdipsey@broward.edu
To: email@basecampccf.com

Hi everyone there at Base Camp. I did not know Mike, nor did my son Joey, who has been helped in several ways by your organization. I can tell by your note that this was a very special man who has today touched the hand of God. I live in South Florida, quite a drive from where his service will be held, so I can't attend.

I will think of Mr. Mike and keep him in my prayers. I'm sure all of the children he helped, who passed before him, threw a big bash up there in heaven. Thank you for letting me know about this very blessed man.

Sincerely, Vicki and Joey Dipsey

I first met Mike shortly after his diagnosis - probably a year or so. He was recommended to me, and I called and asked if he would be a counselor at ROCK camp - the American Cancer Society's camp for children with cancer. It was obvious from the start that we had found an incomparable resource in Mike. Not only could he relate to the children because of his own battle, but because he had the heart of a child and shared its love and warmth with us all.

Through the years that we were together at camp, we could see the slow decline in his health and his energy level, but he never gave up and he never stopped giving. His bright smile was there and his presence was a blessing to us all. He did the best he could and we were just grateful to have him in our lives and to bear witness to his courage and spirit.

Although it has been several years since I have seen Mike, I will miss him. I will remember him always with laughing children in his wake and with his bright face and smiling eyes. Mike was love.

---Linda Wilkenson

From Aunt Georgette & Uncle Rick...

"Michael has always been a sweet, respectful, and affectionate nephew. When he was young, he and Jason spent a little time at our home and Michael was always a cheerful and loving young man. As he matured, he had a quick smile and laugh and always bid us goodbye at family gatherings with a kiss and a hug. He will surely be missed by all."

Psalm 23:4, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

We come here today to mourn my brother; but we should not mourn – we should praise the man that he was and is. Even though he was very sick, for more than 15 yrs he never gave up. He asked me what I thought Heaven would be like and I did not have an answer ... Well, Mike, now you know what Heaven is like as you sit beside the good Lord. His final words to me had nothing to do about him, he told me everything would be all right no matter what happened. As I stood there and held his hand, he was gasping for air, and he looked up at me and told me not to worry and that he loved me very much. I want you to know, Mike, the deal we made to each other, that we would never give up, and, brother, I want you to know you never gave up – you gave in.

I hope one day I will have the same courage that you had. We will be ok, Mike. I just want you to know that. From time to time check in with us. I love you and will never forget the times we had. So, you go now and be with your new family where there is no hurt, no pain, and all the love.

*Love always,
your baby brother
Jason*

My son Mike, people say that you are in a better place; no pain, no doctors. That may be true, but you will always be here, whatever I do, you will always be with me. Remember, "love means never having to say you're sorry." Love, Dad

*My son Mike, I am proud to call you my son. We have had good times and bad times. But the good outweighs the bad. You have been through hell and back, but now you are resting in Heaven. I'll miss you, I will always love you.
Love, Mom L*

I have only known Michael for a short four years. In this brief period of time, he has shown me how kind and unselfish person he was. I got to respect him and love him like a son. Although life had been tough to him for the past seventeen years, his unselfish behavior still took precedence over anything else. He was an active contributor of his time and love to children stricken with cancer.

Michael, we will always love all the memories you have kindly left behind for the rest of us.

Love, Frank

To our beloved Michael,

These mere words cannot possibly express our love to a kind and gentle soul.

Michael really taught us love and caring.

In spite of his relentless illnesses, he managed to devote time and effort to take care of children severely stricken with cancer. His spare time had been devoted to caring for people and animals less fortunate than him. His love for all creatures drew him closer to our hearts.

Michael, we bid you a temporary goodbye, we shall be together again.

Grandma Meme, Frank, and family

Memories

*although we've lost touch in recent years
my childhood memories are still very clear*

memories of birthdays, holidays and such

*memories of naked days and dress up days
and lots of silly stuff*

memories of mud pies and 'motorcycle' rides,

*pictures of bugs on your nose
was your least favorite pose*

but, king of the hill was always our thrill

*these are just a few of the memories we shared growing up
they're the first that come to mind and the ones that we'd both remember most*

your life was too short and for that i am sorry

i will cherish our childhood memories and miss you always

until i see you in heaven.....

*Your cousin
Michelle*

Perseverance, strength, and hope with prayer.

Those were the qualities of my nephew Michael. I remember him as a spirited young boy that enjoyed rides on my motorcycle, taught him how to ride a horse. He loved boats.

As his uncle I have observed the different transitions he had to make throughout his short life. He experienced a brief bout with addiction due to his illness caused by liver failure. His strength and determination enabled him to beat that addiction, but the liver failure persisted. He fought that malady for seventeen years. He was a kind and generous young man, always ready to share what little he had.

Michael, thank you for making us very proud of you.

Love,
Paul, Sherri, and Julie

God gave us Michael to teach us about courage, strength, and generosity.

The way he faced his death was inspiring to say the least. His sense of humor lasted to the very end, and he used it to make people feel better. He could always make me laugh.

He was always kind and generous with his love, giving it to all that needed it. He has many friends in Heaven and on earth, kids with cancer that he counseled in special camps, and the parents of those kids who he consoled when their children passed.

It is said that God never tests a person more than that person can handle and I believe this to be true. To me this only proves that Michael was a very strong person. Not once during his ordeal did I ever hear him complain about the hand he was dealt.

Even when he was very sick in the hospital he was thinking of others, making sure that the people he loved most were ready for his passing, hanging on until he was sure everyone had a chance to say goodbye and would be okay.

I loved Michael very much and I will miss him greatly. I will always remember him for his courage, strength and generosity. He was a very special person and he touched the lives of all who knew him, and in his death he will serve as my mentor on how to live.

---Rick Burden

Michael was my 'adopted' son. His loving spirit and zest for life brought joy to my heart. When Dan and Mike came home to Michigan, it was a joyous family occasion. All of my children welcomed Mike as their brother. He was "Uncle Mike" to my grandchildren.

His delightful sense of humor was contagious. I remember one time, when we went up to northern Michigan, we went into a little store that sold costumes. Mike put on a crazy straw hat and some pie-sized sunglasses and was hamming it up, so I put on a crown and a feather boa, and we stood there, looking silly, with hearts full of laughter, eating ice cream cones. What a joy he was!

His love of life and the simple things was almost childlike, which made him all the more endearing. How could one help but love him, as he stood with face upturned to catch snowflakes on his tongue?

Mike always brought sunshine, wherever he went. Even in the "darkness" of my husband's hospital room, Mike brought his bright-eyed smile that lit up the room.

That's one of the treasured memories I'll always keep in my heart—Mike's bright eyes and his beautiful smile. He lit up my life.

Vada O'Donnell (Mike's Mom O)

21 December 2002. Excerpt from Mike's final diary entry:

"I hope that every person in my family knows how much I love them. They are the best family any one could ever want. I really don't know what I would do without them.

I would like to also thank Dan, Mom, Gram, Jason, and Christy, Meme and Frank; and all of the rest of my family for helping me out so much, Mentally (Emotionally), physically, and monetarily. All of you mean the world. Lot's of love, and know that I'm not giving up, I'm giving in to the Lord. It's up to Him, as I guess it always was."