

## **J.B. Webster, Our Brother**

Brother Art Braden introduced me to JB as part of my interview process for the Commodores. After a grueling interview session at The Barn and years of serving together, I would wonder if he took anything seriously. He talked during officer meetings, he made princesses laugh on parade routes, he printed funny photos with his name on the back, he hammed it up with Pirates & Parade Marshalls, and he translated our problems into life's funny situations. It took me months before I even learned what the "J" stood for. "What does he take seriously", I once asked myself.

Over time, I grew to realize that maybe it was just ME taking my life TOO seriously. He was always quick with a joke, but even quicker to be his own punch line. He was quick with his opinion on a problem, but even quicker to offer to fix it. He was quick to apologize if he was late, but he was always among the last to leave. He was quick to notice everyone's differences, but even quicker to find common ground we could all share and walk upon. He'd be quick to say not to make a big fuss over him, but quicker to visit us if we fell ill ourselves. He was quick to point out some of the women I should have met, but even quicker to tell me of the greatness he experienced being a husband, a father, and a family man.

Some of us weren't smart enough to call JB first, or even second or third. BUT, we knew we could always call him last. Because we knew he'd get the job done, even if he didn't start it ..... we knew he'd transport the last parader, even if we were already back at the hotel .... and we knew he'd organize the group for one of his signature photographs, even if he was taking it with someone else's camera.

If we did call him last, we eventually realized we SHOULD have called him first. But, he never made us feel bad about it. Rather, he would have congratulated us on our own self-awareness in finding the option that made the most sense – calling him for his advice, his counsel.

No one is 100% perfect, but any faults he may have had were overshadowed by his ability to make fun of himself, make mistakes in life, and make a new path where needed ... only now do we have a better understanding that he did so for OUR benefit as much as his own.

In some ways, we're here to pay final respects, but I say it doesn't end here. We certainly do so for his body, may he rest in peace. But certainly not final respect for his heart ... his intelligence ... his spirit ... his beliefs ... his love.

Those feelings continue to thrive and live deep within each of us ... giving us ALL a chance to continue our respect and appreciation for how he touched our lives, encouraged our dreams and impacted our livelihood.

It didn't matter if you were Princess or a Pirate. Broker or a banker. Clown or a Cougar. Pre-schooler or a parent. Alki or Anacortes. Teenager or a tyrant. Boater or a biker. Eastsider or East Coaster. Windermere or Wenatchee.

What mattered was JB's innate ability to make you feel as if you were THE single most important person in the room - the ONLY person in the room. JB offered no barriers, only bricks to build a house of commonality he kept open to others 24 / 7.

All of us here, and many abroad, are proof that six degrees of separation does exist. JB's ability to relate to, and combine, all walks of life created a common trip through commitment, desire, loyalty and love as he led us on life's journeys together. Journeys we willingly accepted, craved internally, and will now treasure more than ever.

He cared more about the potential of your heart and sensitivity of your soul, than about the patch on your jacket, logo on your business card, or club you belonged to.

In conversation, he'd smoothly add "yes, she's my sister" or "whatever you need my brother." As much as he said that, he didn't mean it casually.

When he called you sister, he was really saying he straighten out your guy if he ever got out of line, or he'd be in his car before you could finish saying "flat tire".

When he called you brother, he meant he had your back and loved you regardless of race, religion, color, politics, and he'd even forgive your ignorance for not ordering the Cajun styled chicken wings.

He dramatically changed our world, individually and collectively.

Yet, he expected nothing in return from us, but a handshake, a smile and a hug.

He asked nothing of us, but hoped we'd be honest with ourselves, make a difference in our world and embrace each other as he embraced us – literally.

He didn't ask us to change ourselves, but we naturally followed in the examples and standards he set for himself.

We will continue to march on, princesses will continue to smile, his children will continue to grow and embrace the world ahead of them, family & friends will continue to recall his fond memories.

We know this because JB continues on within each of us individually. More importantly, he lives within us collectively as HIS family, HIS sisters, HIS brothers and HIS community.

He'd be honored to know we're here to pray for him, but he'd be extremely disappointed if we forget to pray for one another .... forget to believe in ourselves .... forget to support one another .... forget to make fun of ourselves .... or forget to treat each other as warmly & unselfishly as he TAUGHT us how to do.

He'd be disappointed if we leave here and fail to embrace life, embrace opportunity and embrace each other. And not just today ... but every day we are able to do so.

While we all grieve differently, remember his handshake differently, and treasure his photos differently .... we must all remember him the same way. As a loving man that stood up for who and what he believed in, judged us on our own merits, and often invited our inner child to come out and play with his.

The levee of harsh reality broke last week, flooding our hearts with sadness and filling our minds with awareness. The holes in the levee may never be fully repaired, but that's okay. Any holes in the levee allow his memories to constantly trickle down into our spirits, filling the gaps we have in our hearts with waves of love, friendship and reminders to make the most out of our lives.

He would want us to replace the affects of numbness and sudden loss with feelings of love, hope, brotherhood, and friendship. And not just of him, but of each other.

Whether we may have called JB last, it's safe to say we will remember him first.

It took me time to figure out that he did indeed know WHAT to take seriously, and what NOT to. And it did take me a while to find out what the "J" stood for.

But, early on, it was easy to see that the "B" stood for Brother.

Always had. And always will.

*Respectfully submitted by someone who was honored to stand by his side ... and laugh with him until our sides hurt. Admirer, Student, & Seafair Commodore Operations Officer 2009,*

*Joseph F. Gong, II  
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