

Patsy Verhoeven

Subject: FW: Hey Dale!!

From: machristner@earthlink.net [mailto:machristner@earthlink.net]
Sent: Thursday, March 03, 2005 11:30 AM
To: Patsy Verhoeven
Subject: Hey Dale!!

Hey Dale,

There's a story that I have been meaning to tell you for a while. About four months ago I got a call from a former student... now I still remember this cat, a real memorable thug if ya know what I mean, his name was Nate, he was from New Haven, big, bad, black kid all ripped up' - really muscular in a prison sort of way... In fact this guy was always kind of my gold standard of bad ass mother-fuckers that I ever have had in any of my classes... He had 4 bullet holes; 3 were from getting strafed by an Uzi, another was a 38 slug that came out his shoulder and he had a decent knife scar across his stomach... He also had an up-coming crack business that he had built up, and that his old lady was running while he was at Eagle Rock. Now all and all he was a pretty decent kid, articulate and smart... kind of edgy around white guys with long hair, but you'll have that.. Anyway he did not last very long... he left almost right after the wilderness trip, like so many of the kids there. But I remembered him cause he was such a bad-ass and I remembered sitting on the steps and talking to him about his decision to leave the school and to go back home and what it means to try to be a good man in a bad place... anyway 10 years later this cat calls me up out of nowhere and says that I changed and saved his life, he's now the operations manager of some big company in New Haven, married and the father of kids, owns his own house... yada, yada and that I was the teacher that really got him to take look at himself and believe in his own intellect and abilities. Dale you know, this the kind of call every teacher hopes they will get some day.... Anyway this isn't about Nate's story, it isn't even about my story... it's about your story Dale. It's your story because it's all your damn fault. You started this, by being that kind of man, that kind of teacher... I remember you doing that reading from Stienbeck's "Red Pony" at the lodge and tears streaming down my face from your telling of that story. I remember being in desert of Big Bend, having my very first patrol... the kids were on solo and we were talking about Casdaneta's Tales of Power and I was asking you if there really was magic and power still left in the world... and than at that moment a butterfly landed on your mustache, as if to answer the question... I remember how you always took the time, and the interest in and had mercy on all your socially retarded and inept students, like Helfridge, Penner, Nesland, Batch and myself.... And how you made us believed, Dale; you made us believe that we could be more than just stoners and misfits. We started to believe in ourselves, in our thoughts, in our abilities, in our potential... We started to believe in the possibility that maybe, just maybe... that we could become good men, strong men, wise men... Just Like You Dale. That maybe we could overcome our fears and stand up straight, step up to the plate... and that maybe, some of us could even leave Arvada / Lakewood and see the world, maybe we could actually become Teachers, Boatmen, Mountain Guides and the most daunting of all occupations... real men. Through your words and by your example Dale, you taught us to become more than we ever could have ever imagined our self's to be... I remember being scared shitless as I watched your boat go over the lip of Big Drop 3... and realizing that I lost my mark and I wasn't sure where I should be setting up, but I remembered that while we were scouting the rapid you gave me that look... that look that said "you can do this...I know you can do this" and that "you'll figure it out when you get there" shrug... And in that moment, as I stood there on that oar frame, sweating my ass off, trying to see the slot, trying to remember that you believed in me, even when I couldn't find in it myself. Right then, a humming bird landed on my shoulder, looked at me, than looked down stream and than flew off... I knew than that it was the same message I got in Big Bend with you and that you were near by and that I could do it and that I would make it through.

Dale I wonder if you can even begin to know how many people, how many lives, how many students you have effected? And to what extent this has rippled out from you to people you have never even met. The influence you have had to help people, reach people, change educational institutions, to make this world different... and if you don't believe me, well there is a young man named Nate that wants to

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talk to you. Yeah, it's all your doing Dale. And you did all that by just trying to live your life as an impeccable warrior. I and many others (not the lest of which are these pirates and river scum that you call friends), we owe you so much... everything that we are, everything that we hope and aspire to be and maybe on good days, sometimes actually are, is due to you... I just want you to know that I love you and I suspect, that on more than one occasion you have saved my life too... Not by your hand or by your words, but by your deeds, by teaching me what it is to be patient, what it is to be compassionate, what it is to be empathetic, what it is to be generous and kind, what it is to be strong, stern and loving all at the same time... by teaching to me how to be a man, a teacher and a father... I am deeply in your debit and grateful that you have been part of my life. I love you very deeply and I shutter to think what my life would have become without your kind and decent interventions.

I have to say that it is very daunting to write a letter to your old English teacher... in particularly after having polished off a good portion of a bottle of excellent wine. Which brings me to the present... there are still some great bottles of wine to be uncorked, still some lies and stories to be told and embellish around the fire. Still more rivers, mountains and oceans to cross and still more time to laugh, love, cry, philosophize and howl at the moon as it dances in the starry night. So get well, be strong and come and dance on the beach under the desert sky and share your presences with those who love you Dale.... You are my hero.

With my deepest respect, love and gratitude...

Michael Christner