

Roger Knows Best

Memorial Eulogy by Eddie



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March 9, 1991. At a bar called The Eagle's Nest. Everybody goes to the Eagle on Saturday night. To hang out, look around, cruise, and chat with your friends, which are the same friends you saw hours ago at the gym. Every Saturday night the same routine. It becomes a bit tiresome. But this Saturday magic is going to happen. I will meet Roger. I'm into cute small white boys. The ones you can just pick up and play with. Roger is perfect, red baseball cap and all.

You never cruise someone when you're with friends. It's a rule. My friends finally leave. This is my big chance. I look over and...where is he? Damn! He left! I'm angry and storm into the next room. SMACK!!! I run right into him. Awkward!!!

I've got to recover. Say something.

"Oh hi. You come here often" He replied "No".

Think of something else.

"My name is Eddie."

"My name is Roger Brigham"

"Don't tell. You killed my Father. Prepare to die"

Dead silence.

"No, just Roger Brigham"

"Brigham?"

"Yes, as in Brigham Young.

You know who Brigham Young was don't you."

"Oh Yes, he played the father on" Father Knows Best".

Dead silence. He just stares.

We start talking. I really want to take this kid home.

Now, when you really like someone, instead of walking 15 blocks to your apartment, you take a cab.

“I’ll get a Cab”

“I have a car.”

OMG, he’s gorgeous and he drives. What more can one ask for. Understand that New Yorkers don’t drive. We take cabs, we take trains, we don’t do drive.

We went home, had great sex, (bland enough to be safe, but kinky enough to be fun).

He left on Sunday Morning, back to Albany.

The rule is if you like someone and want to get together again, you wait till Thursday to give him a call, so you can get together for the weekend.

Roger is a rule breaker. He calls on Monday, and every night till we get together on Saturday, at the Eagle.

When he was ready to leave on Sunday morning , I say “You can’t leave, I’m sort of in love with you”

And Roger thinks “Don’t panic he’s just being Hispanic. It will pass.”

But, the long-distance relationship between Albany and Manhattan starts to grow.

Roger is full of mischief and enjoys taking me out of my comfort zone.

“What’s with all the Beethoven and Chopin. Try some Gershwin and Ravel” Which I do.

Or the Lift America for Special Olympics. He has joined a Weightlifting gym in Albany.

Weightlifters are a different breed. They don’t care if they have a gut or not. They are a gang, and they encourage one another. The point is to lift as heavy as possible. I can’t compete

with these people. But Roger commits me to dead lift 405 lbs. That's 4 plates on each side. I have 3 weeks to prepare. My training partner, Mike, helps me train. I'm the first one up. "Eddie from New York" is announced. I guess that's me. So, I go up and lift my 4 plates. Everyone comes over, congratulates me and says I am really strong.

Then they load the bar with 5 plates, then 6 plates, then 7 plates. Awkward!!!

But I do raise \$1,500 for the Special Olympics.

But the biggest "Out of my comfort zone" episode is yet to come.

He is offered a job at the Oakland Tribune and asks if I would move to California with him.

I'm a New Yorker. I don't know anything about California.

But my very good friend Rogan Brown, lasted 10 years with HIV before he passed away.

So, move to California for 10 years with the man I love. I take a deep breath and say "Yes, I'll move with you."

Telling Mom & Dad that I'm leaving New York and moving to San Francisco was easy.

The bear is going to be telling Aunt Melba.

Mother has 8 sisters. All under 5 feet tall. Melba is the eldest, the head of the family. Very dominating, very demanding, a real Cuban Dowager. So, it's Thanksgiving at Mom & Dad's house. The whole family is here. All the sisters are here. Roger is here. They all know that this is the boy Eddie is moving to California with. Sacrilege!!!

Melba is sitting in her throne-like chair, starring at Roger the whole time. I finally walk up to her and say "Melba, I'm moving to San Francisco with Roger". She stares at me for what seems forever. Finally, she says "I love San Francisco, they make the most wonderful crabs".

That was it. We have her blessing. Let's move.

The San Francisco Bay area is a lot of fun. We are able to buy a house. Our mutual hobby of tropical fish now includes frogs, geckos, skinks, newts, turtles, and koi. 2 cats now become 6, and we add Bernese Mountain Dogs.

We learn a lot about one another. He tells me about all his adventures in college with all his friends in "The Fellowship".

He tells me about the first time he ran for President of the Student Council. He stands up and says "I'm Roger Brigham and I'm running for President" They laugh. "Who is this guy? I can't even see him. Tell him to stand on a chair or something." He loses.

He tries again the following year and says "I'm Roger Brigham and I'm running for president", Then he stands up on a chair so people could see him. Thunderous applause. He wins that year.

And he also tells me how he got into Rugby.

Having finished a late Wrestling practice that evening, he heads toward his dorm. Members of the school Rugby team are outside. They are all drinking and don't let him pass.

One comes up to Roger, and Roger pins him. Then another and Roger Pins him. One by one, he pins them all and enters the dorm.

The following evening, the team sneaks into Roger's room and kidnap him. They explain the rules of the game on the bus, and now he's hooked. He loves the game and keeps playing ever since.

But, he still likes taking me out of my comfort zone. 'You've built a nice body, now learn to do something with it' and proceeds to gift me a 3-month memberships to a school that practices a martial art called Aikido. "If you don't like it, just quit." But 23 years later, I'm a 3rd degree black belt.

In the meantime, he now has artificial hips so can't really play Rugby, but he can still wrestle. He finds a wrestling club in San Francisco called Golden Gate Westling. It's run by this guy called Gene Dermody. He checks it out first to make sure it's not just some porn site. He realizes it's legit and attends a practice.

Gene is on vacation for 2 weeks, but the practice is run by this kid called Johny Alimony. Roger raves about him when he gets home. It was so great being on the mat again after so long. He takes off his shirt and to my shock, his body is covered with fingerprints. Fingerprints all over him. I yell "What the hell did they do to you??"

He calms me down and says this is normal because he has not wrestled in a long time and his body is not used to the grabs.

I don't believe him.

But he keeps training, eventually meets Gene, and they hit it off because they have so much in common. He becomes very involved with Golden Gate. This leads him to get involved with The Gay Games. So much so that he takes me out of my comfort zone yet again, and insists I do martial arts at the Chicago Gay Games while he does wrestling. I get a silver, he gets a gold.

This leads to getting involved with Wrestlers Without Borders, which leads to being columnist for the Bay Area Reporter, and then Coach to the kids at Mission High School.

"I'm not your friend. I'm your coach. After you graduate. I will be your friend. "And that proved to be so true. These kids are now wonderful friends.

And then he gets sick. Really sick. Intensive care, Kaposi Sarcoma, Pneumonia, under 100 lbs. I know I'm going to lose him. 2 days later they come out with this new drug. A Protease inhibitor. It was a cocktail of 3 different drugs. Well, that's nice, but a bit late. There is nothing for the drug to grab on to. He's practically dead. But they give him the drug anyway.

It's like in the horror movies, when they take the stake out of the vampire's heart, and then you see the veins form and the skin form, and he comes back to life. Roger comes back to life. Kaposi Sarcoma is gone, his lungs are clear, he starts to gain weight.

Still wrestling, still getting involved, still coaching.

Then a few years later, all the medications he is Hemo dialyses 11 hours a day, every day. All our activities are based on his dialyses schedule. We come to terms that he will be on dialyses for the rest of his life.

Then the phone call. 11 O'clock at night. We are in bed.

"Yes, Yes, Yes, OK" he hangs up.

"Who was that?"

"It was the hospital. They found a kidney match. They'll call me in the morning.

Go back to sleep."

"WHAT!!!!!!!!!!!!!! GO BACK TO SLEEP!!!!!!!!!!" Are you crazy!!!!

But he's the 2nd in line. The kidney's not his. They have to prepare him for surgery anyway. There's a 50% chance he will get it.

"Go to the office. There's nothing to do here but wait. I'll call you if they decide anything"

I get to the office. My phone rings, It's Roger.

"I'm getting the kidney".

The yelling, screaming, and crying I do at that moment is something I have never done before. People come out of their offices. "What's happened to Eduardo"

I'm curled up on the floor, in a corner, crying, and repeating " He has his life back, He has his life back."

Needless to say, the operation is a success, despite the fact that Fedex loses the kidney and finds it again. So, the operation is delayed. But it works and he does indeed have his life back.

Roger is the bravest person I have ever known. He is always in pain, but never shows it. A true athlete to the end. He always comes back to life. But this time he just wants the pain to end. He calls me that night from the hospital and asks that I forgive him because he just

cannot take the pain any more. He calls his best friends from the hospital bed that Wednesday night to say goodbye. He begs me to take him out of that hospital. He wants to die at home.

He dies in his own bedroom, in his own house, surrounded by family, friends, cats on the bed, dogs under the bed, overlooking his garden.

Our 10 year contract lasted 34 years. Was it worth it?

More than you can ever imagine.

I hope everyone gets the opportunity to love someone this completely. The pain of losing them is unbearable, but the time we have together is wonderful.

Thank you, Roger, for your love and for making me a better person.

I will miss you.