

A Tribute at Michael Willette's funeral

From Dan Haugh: "A local poet who knew Mike well"

[Editor's note: Dan is distantly related to Mike Willette: his aunt Marice Theresa (sister of his father Ray Haugh) married William George Murry, the great-grandson of Almira Perrizo Almira was the sister of Mitchell Perrizo, the great-grandfather of Mike Willette.]

To those from some distance away, Mike's obituary might seem rather ordinary. Mike was born, served his country in the navy, married the love of his life, succeeded his father on the family farm, and with his siblings grew the venture into the successful operation it came to be.

To those of us that grew up with Mike, or were related to Mike, or who had social or professional relationships with Mike, we know the story of his life is much larger and more meaningful than can be told in any newspaper column.

To become a great father, farmer, and seedsman, Mike relied heavily on two gifts from his God: fertility and Faith.

One definition of fertility is to be "intellectually productive, or capable of producing abundantly and sustaining vigorous and luxuriant growth." Another is the "ability to develop into a complete entity."

The farm of his fathers in Prescott Township was fertile indeed, but Mike never stopped striving to improve and preserve the rich God-given soil. While always thankful for the harvest, he was never content with the status quo, and kept an open mind and a willingness to try another way in hopes of compounding God's gifts. To not do so would suggest stagnation, and Mike would have none of that!

Mike brought the same values into the farmhouse in raising his family. He witnessed their "vigorous and luxuriant growth". Like the wheat on the hill, they germinated and tillered and withstood the same winds as the neighbors. At times they might lean a different direction, but grew and prospered all the same.

Who among us failed to grow and prosper in Mike's presence? A 22 year old rookie was sent to secure a business deal with the Seed Farm. Nervous and fearful of losing the business of the large farmer, the rookie begged others to go. Thankfully no one did.

Had he been denied the opportunity, the rookie would have forfeited his chance to 'develop into a complete entity.' He would have failed to feel the firm grip of Mike's handshake, and the warm welcome into his office. The rookie would have missed the revelation that large farmers can be humble and even polite! Mike's considerate, yet factual and prudent approach to the meeting would forever enhance the way the rookie would perceive his job in the future.

Fertility alone can neither raise a crop, nor a family. Faith would be Mike's stronghold. All the research, planning, and applied concepts of the day would be worthless without the Faith that God will send the needed sunshine to dry the dew, and apply the gentle rains to dew the dry.

While he or any member of his family might choose to take the road less traveled, Mike's Faith always held constant that God would guide them and they would arrive safely.

While its true Mike lived a long and full life on earth, many of us feel cheated that he didn't live a longer time in his "golden retirement years." He wasn't done seeking new ways to do old things. There could always be a better tomato, a more bug free orchard, a new book to read.

We've all witnessed and defined Mike's purpose here on earth. We'll miss his involvement with the family, community, church, and world. But maybe we're being a bit selfish. Perhaps God has a greater need which we'll all discover on our day of calling.

I perceive God's welcome home to Mike as follows:

Mike's Welcome Home

Come into my garden
I created it just for you
But this no heavenly garden
You'll see there's plenty to do!

To bring you to a perfect place
I knew you would not like
My garden here has challenge to face
Mysteries to solve, just made for you Mike!

Rocks and weeds for you to slay
I'll scatter them throughout
For some its work, for you its play
You'll deal with floods, and conquer drought!

A brighter shade, a quicker pace
I'll plant new discoveries every day
Abundant growth in a smaller space
All yours to solve, in your own way!

When at last you've mastered all
And fear no fears are left to face
To one more challenge will I call—
Together, can we, figure out that human race?

Dan Haugh March 2009