

A Eulogy for Richard Cole
July 19, 2005

I didn't know the Richard Cole that his family smiles to tell about. I wish I had. I like to think of that Richard, though, looking over the soda counter at a beautiful girl named Irene, smiling his handsome smile, winking a bright blue eye as he added a few extra cherries to her drink. It was a fine start to 53 years of life together. I like to imagine that Richard tinkering in his shop out back, working as only a child of the depression can, always mending, always fixing, always making something, or making something better. I'm sure the things he loved to make most were for his grandchildren – like those specialized lamps he made for each of you: for Gretchen a teddy bear, for Elliott a baseball mit, for Addison a Mickey Mouse. I like to picture that Richard, active, strong, working the night shift in order to play “Mr. Mom” for his three children during the day. You see, Irene was a professional, even before it was really accepted for mothers to work outside the home. I like to picture that Richard at the counter of Eastern Airlines, lending his smile and kind words to a world that is always late and always frustrated. (The next time you're out of time and

out of luck with an airline reservation wouldn't you like to know that Richard would greet you at the counter?)

I like to think of that Richard Cole – the Richard Cole who never did nothing (repeat): the faithful patriot-U.S. Navy veteran; the scoutmaster-father, the creative chef and square dancing husband, the fun and ever-active “Paw Paw.”

Yes, I like to think of that Richard Cole, and I hope that he will be this family's lasting memory, despite the years in which Richard's health kept him from being who he really was. I believe Richard was the first person that Amy and I visited in the hospital after moving to Charlotte, and too many of our visits with him were in the hospital, or at home as he was convalescing. Picturing the Richard that his family tells us about helps me to understand even more the frustration of his years of pain. His was a pain that no one should have to endure. But that pain is no more. And a family's memories will speak forever true of the smiling, bright-eyed energetic, youthful Richard Cole who wooed a beautiful young woman into marriage, who raised three wonderful children to carry his legacy, who took as much pride in his three promising young grandchildren as any man who has ever worn the name,

“Grandfather.” And a family’s faith will speak to them for all the days ahead of that *new body* the scripture says he has now inherited, and of that place that is beyond tears and pain, which they claim in promise as his new home.

We cannot explain the basic unfairness of this life, why it is that some few seem to get more than their fair share when others seem to go completely untouched by trouble through this life. But it is my prayer for you who knew Richard best and loved him most that the legacy of his life and the promise of his hope will never disappoint you in the God whom I believe has been there every step of the way, the God who, even today, holds Richard fast in eternal love. The Apostle Paul said to the people of the church at Rome who were being persecuted, “*I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed in us.*” So I pray on this day of celebration for Richard’s life that you might be honest about his sufferings, and your own, but that you may even more so claim that glory which has been revealed in you through your father and grandfather, and which is revealed in him, even in his death, through the God of Jesus Christ, who is our resurrection and our life.

As this family shared yesterday with Amy, they made a remarkable and honest observation about their parents. It is a final thought by which I will remember and always appreciate Richard Cole. Irene, all the children agreed, was really the spiritual force in the family. It was their mother, not unlike like countless mothers across the ages, who held up the light of faithful discipleship as a priority for their home. But... their father, unlike an untold number of fathers who let spiritual life be a mother’s choice to give, chose to make his quiet faith an active part of the family life together. Richard did not take his wife and children to church as so many have. He came with them. Faithfully. Consistently. You might even say, religiously! And in doing so, he bequeathed to his offspring an indescribable gift of God – that gracious gift of a living example. The vibrant faith of all of Richard’s family is a living testimony not just to Irene’s spiritual instinct, but to Richard’s active obedience and faithful discipleship. As a pastor, I can only pray for more fathers like Richard Cole, whose commitment to their wives and their children would be made

manifest in lives of active response, which produce, in turn, a strong, confident faith – if ever so quiet.

In Isaiah we read: *For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.* I believe Richard Cole was a man of such quiet trust. It was his strength. And his returning and rest has become his salvation.

For Richard Cole, Thanks be to God.