

Russell Vern Baird, Jr.

Russ's dad was my mother's brother. During their childhood, life was difficult, and their parents separated when my mother was in her teen years. Their father was a harsh man.

I believe that from those hard beginnings they made a pact - whether it was spoken or unspoken, I am uncertain. But, I believe they made a pact assuring that their families would forever be bonded. Russ's mother, Thelma, and my mom, Ginnie, made sure of that.

Russ was an only child; I was the first born.

Russ was a bit older than me, so the story of our relationship began when I was born. From that day forward we became more like brothers than cousins.

The bond of brotherhood is forged by shared experiences.

Ours was hewn from a thousand.



A thousand games played in his backyard or mine - football, kickball, baseball, basketball - sometimes just spending hours just throwing balls back and forth or playing horse, talking about what not.

A thousand wars fought in the weeds down from his house or up in the hills behind ours.

John Wayne and Audey Murphy whipping the Japs.

A circled wagon train fending off the Indians.

The good guys defeating all sorts of bad guys;

A band of brothers sort of thing.

A thousand trips sliding down snow covered hills at Bertha Brock Park.

A thousand laps around the skating rink at the corner of Jackson and Lincoln, or blading across the steel blue ice of Long Lake, while his dad ice fished.

A thousand times around Long Lake, Morrison Lake, Houghton Lake, water skiing doubles, putting on a show.

A thousand mornings' pheasant and deer hunting with our fathers.

A thousand nails pounded into the house we helped his dad build.

A thousand times cruisin the gut in Big I, from Main St. through the A&W, in his car or mine.

At least a thousand beers raised - many Coronas, his new favorite.

And, a thousand family celebrations - birthdays, anniversaries, vacations, Thanksgiving, Christmas, a couple of weddings, countless funerals and many more other occasions to just get together.

Bit by bit, piece by piece a brotherhood was forged, held together by more than simply kinship, riveted together by a mosaic of shared experiences, such that even in his death, Russ is with me.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Russ was a good man,

A good brother.

James Gregory Maynard

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