

Lee Posey Eulogy

My name is Larry Keener and I have known Lee Posey for 32 years and except for a few formal evenings in a tuxedo, I have not worn a bow tie in public since I was in short pants. It seemed fitting to wear one today.

It has been my pleasure to have been Lee's protégé, partner, friend and admirer. I believe Lee asked me to speak at his service because he thought our long and close relationship, with its many phases, shared successes and shared struggles, gave me a unique perspective of him as a complete person, a very special human of enormous qualities. A person who could awe you with his pure goodness, rightness, generosity or sheer brilliance and on other occasions demonstrate his human flaws with equal intensity

As you would expect, I have spent a lot of time thinking about the appropriate things to say about Lee. He came from so little, accomplished so much and helped so many that briefly retelling his life story would certainly be appropriate today, it would probably be informative to many here, and it would absolutely be inspirational to us all. It is wholly an American story of humble beginnings, unrecognized genius, chance encounters, charitable helping hands, hard work, achievement, reward and ultimately giving back. However tempting, retelling his inspirational life story is not the path I chose to take.

Instead, what I would like to do and more importantly, what I believe Lee would want me to do is to share with you the Lee Posey I knew personally for over 3 decades.

The Lee Posey I knew was a complex man of simple virtues. He was also an enigma who could baffle your understanding. He could be charming and brusque, gregarious and aloof, engaged and disinterested, sphinx-like or moody – all in one meeting or encounter. Never predictable and always with a purpose, he nevertheless seemed to find the right tone, the right words, the right actions to advance an opportunity or heal a breach. In everything he did, he was pure intensity, and like anything unadulterated... Lee Posey could be an acquired taste.

I acquired a taste for Lee early in our relationship and over the years saw him in many roles. The roles that impacted and inspired me the most were:

- His role as a business partner
- His role as a husband
- His role as a Christian

One word would best describe Lee as a business partner – INTEGRITY. Someone once defined integrity as “what you do when no one is watching”. Lee's personal ethics and his business ethics were inseparable and both were of the highest standard. Let me tell you a story to illustrate the point.

- Met Lee in 1977 after he had left Redman Homes, looking to start or acquire his own company
- He made a tender offer for small company I worked for

- Acquired 15-20% company but not enough to control
- About a month after the tender offer expired
- Call from friend in financial trouble
- He wanted to know if I thought Posey was still interested in his stock
- Called Lee
- He said “Tell your friend to keep his shares”
- What I didn’t know, but Lee did know, an offer was going to be made for 3x Lee’s offer
- Lee could have tripled his money in 30 days
- I asked him about this right after joining PHH
- He said it would not have been right
- Mentioned the story over 20 years later, he had forgotten it
- An extraordinary act by an extraordinary man – but, to him he was simply doing the right thing.

While Lee was intensely motivated and competitive, he was not a win at all costs individual. He also was not selfish or shortsighted. At Palm Harbor he allowed dozens of people to buy into the company because as he used to say “The only way you can be certain someone will act like an owner is for them to be an owner”. This may have been enlightened self interest on his part – but it was uncommon enlightened self interest.

His pride in Palm Harbor was based upon the quality of our products, our reputation for unmatched customer satisfaction and the fact the company created thousands of quality jobs and careers for a diverse group of unique people. He told me several times that the opportunities Palm Harbor had created for so many people was his proudest business accomplishment. The wealth created, the reputation, the recognition, the position afforded someone who builds a company like Palm Harbor Homes were all important but secondary to him, providing opportunity to deserving people was what mattered most.

Lest those of you who did not work with Lee might think at this point that he was some type of saint – let me quickly disabuse you of that thought.

Lee could be prickly, impossible to please, hypercritical and impulsive. Over the years I have heard him described as a “people junkie”, an “entrepreneur in heat” and a “mad genius”.....among other things! I remember a new manager getting caught in traffic and being “on time” and therefore late to his first Posey meeting. Lee finished his opening thoughts then said..... “Tom, only 2 kinds of people are late for my meetings, either they are independently wealthy or don’t give a damn. Which is it with you?”

I can’t tell you how many times I saw someone melt under his questioning to the point of giving long pointless answers only to have Lee retort.

“Tell me, how long have you worked for us..... not including today?”

These “Poseyisms” as we called them, were all a part of his personality, and we knew they were part of the bargain along with the unwavering support, wisdom, leadership and integrity we all experienced. The one thing everyone knew about Lee; partners, associates, competitors, customers and investors alike, was that you could trust him. He always did what he said he would do, even if,

and especially if, doing so was not in his immediate best interest. If a person's net worth in integrity and trust could be measured in dollars, then Lee Posey was a billionaire.

To any of you who knew Lee Posey well, you knew he was a completely different person around the love of his life, his wife, Sally. This taciturn, seemingly emotionless businessman could be almost teenage in his giddiness and attentiveness to Sally. What I didn't know at first, but later discovered and came to appreciate, was that Lee Posey was a hopeless romantic. He believed he had won the matrimonial lottery when he and Sally married and he never stopped believing his good fortune. To me, he acted like Sally might wake up some day and realize her mistake.

The love and devotion Lee had for Sally was always on display. I never saw him exasperated, short, agitated or impatient with Sally. I am sure it must have happened but, I never saw it. Sally was the person Lee respected the most and loved more than anything. It showed in all his actions.

It is a credit to Sally that her love for Lee could transform a man so completely. What I learned from this marriage was that patience truly is a virtue, that love must sometimes be not only blind but also deaf, and that true love will in fact conquer all if nurtured and allowed to flourish.

Let me tell you another story:

- 20 years ago / movie "Amadeus" was popular, Lee loved the movie and the music
- Came out to go to dinner / Mozart symphony
- Bad traffic, barely made it, lights going down
- Sally tells Lee "thinks" she left coffee pot on
- Without hesitation, protest, or argument
- Lee returns home and gets back in time for the last few minutes. He never said a word or acted agitated
- My wife asked me how I would have responded, I am afraid not as well.

This was the type of husband that I saw in Lee. It inspired me to try harder and be more patient, loving and kind. And, even though my wife would tell you I am still a work in progress, Lee's example will never leave me, and I am not alone. Lee impacted a whole generation of young men in the same positive way. His example changed attitudes, perceptions and behaviors that enriched relationships. I know because I was one so affected.

Lee loved his "girls" – Sally, his daughters Jill and Jenny, and his two granddaughters, Rowan and Finley. He doted on Rowan and Finley, becoming that "grandfather" with pictures or an amusing anecdote always at the ready. He spent his last days authoring a children's book for them, which was really his "love story" for his 2 young girls and his 3 grown up girls.

I was fortunate to be raised by wonderful parents in a fine Christian home. I learned early in life that God is love. What I learned about Christian love from Lee Posey is that love is action.

Lee Posey loved people and because he loved them he wanted to help them. Whether you were a disadvantaged young woman who needed a chance, an up and coming young businessman who needed an opportunity or a down and out friend who needed a helping hand, Lee was always there to help.

Lee never got so caught up in what the world defines as success that he used all his time, talent, resources and energy solely to pursue fame or profit. Lee was more worried about having a life of SIGNIFICANCE. The type of significance that matters to a Christian. The type of SIGNIFICANCE that causes you not only to love others as yourself but to SERVE them as well. The SIGNIFICANCE of Lee's life is found in the hearts and lives of those he encountered and in some way bettered their lives because he loved – with the type of love God has for all his children.....and, because he acted.

Look around this church. There are people of all ages, races, faiths and persuasions here today. What connects us? The only thing common to all of us is that we all knew Lee, and we loved him, and he loved us. Most of us here today had our lives positively impacted either directly or indirectly by this man. Many of us would have never even known each other were it not for Lee. The trajectories of our lives were changed forever simply by knowing him.

It is said that a “man's work is his love made visible”. In Lee's case this is certainly true. Whether it was Palm Harbor Homes, the Foundation for the Education of Young Women, The Ann Richards or Irma Rangel schools, or the Posey Leadership Institute, Lee's love of each was obvious. Each has made a difference and each will continue making a difference because of the efforts of the many now connected by the love of one man.

To me, the words FULL and MORE best describe Lee Posey's life. With everything he did, he was always doing more, with everything he was, he was always something more – leading some further life, accomplishing some further goal, learning some further skill.

I believe more than anything else, it was his faith that gave him the MORE that defined him: a place to stand outside his own life, the power to actively care, the pathway to live a higher life.

A few months after Lee was diagnosed with his cancer I told him of a terrific young couple I knew who had just learned that the wife had a stage III aggressive cancer. The couple had 2 young children under the age of 5 and were dealing valiantly with the sudden and tragic change in their lives. Lee wanted to contact them, meet them and help them if he could. He introduced himself with an email. I want to read an excerpt of that email as an example of his Christian love for others in action.

“I do not have any magic words that will take your pain and stress away but I would like to meet you and your husband if you are so inclined. I have found that talking helps and making new friends helps. I have found that by focusing on others I do not think about what might or might not be. My wife and I would like to help you and your husband in any way we can. Please let us.

When I was first diagnosed, 8.31.04, I was really in denial. I am 70 years old, have run marathons, climbed real mountains and lived a life of adventure and travel without ever being sick or hospitalized for anything except knee surgery. After about three weeks I let the love of all my friends and the love of God take over and accepted the opportunity to live everyday with love and prayer in my heart for others. I have been showered, just as you have with emails, cards, calls, and prayers from every corner of the earth, many from people that I do not even know. I have responded by renewing my efforts to help those around me. I tell people and believe, that this is another of my adventures and that I am having the time of life. I do not know what will come.”

But now, we do know what came.....And so, today,

We grieve, as we should, for this amazing life it was our pleasure to share, for the sad eyed family and friends who still ache with shared sorrow over the loss of this commanding figure.

But also, we must celebrate today as Lee wanted us to celebrate. Celebrate a life well lived, a talent fully developed, an example clearly visible and a legacy fully secured.

We also must celebrate in the unshakeable knowledge that God's infallible hand is in all this; that He guides, He comforts, He abides.

And if we listen carefully in future days, the Creator and His remarkable new arrival will no doubt conspire to nudge us in ways both kind and generous, reminding us that all earthly pain is temporary and all separations conclude in joyous eternal reunions. Thus we should wait, but not passively, but actively caring, giving and loving in the example of the amazing life of Lee Posey.