

A Farewell to Robert

By Patric Peake

He was seconds old when I looked into his eyes and saw a brilliant Light, coming from within. He came to me on my birthday—our birthday.

When I say “farewell” to him, some 32 years later, I am certain that that Light in his eyes will shine as bright as ever. My son will move to London.

Part of me knew that Robert was not really of this world. My wife and I discovered this when, at five years old, he dictated an original poem to his mother that read like a spiritual discourse.

But another part of me knew that it was my job to make him familiar with the things of this world. I started right away.

At one day old, I stuck a plum in his hand, told him it was a basketball, and taught him a hook shot. At two days old I stuck a chess knight in his tiny hand and taught him the Ruy Lopez opening. In high school he became the top player on the chess team.

At three years old, Mom read to him from a Pop-Up Spiderman book. In a few years he was reading at an adult level. At 23, he and I went together to the opening of the first Spiderman Movie and watched it together from the third row.

At age six, I brought him a computer. In a few years, he was teaching me programming code.

As a young teen, I showed him fishing and camping and hiking. I was his assistant scoutmaster for boy scouts. The camping and hiking hooked him. The fishing did not.

One day, he asked me to take him hunting with his BB gun. He wanted to see what it was like to kill something. I took him to an asparagus field where red-winged blackbirds flocked. He picked out his prey, fired one shot, and down went the bird with a hole in its eye. That was his first and last hunting trip. He wrote a poem about it years later.

Despite my efforts to provide him a “normal” healthy childhood, we all knew Robert’s path would be unique. In high school history class, he and his best friend, Robbie, changed the course of a World War II in a simulation with their clever, if not somewhat shady, dealings. Their small, Soviet satellite ended up taking over the world.

Robert and Robbie’s video commercial all in Spanish for high school Spanish class, was shown to other classes for years to come. They were selling *Brain Rico*, brains that came in can for people to improve their health and make them peppier.

By his senior year, Robert was sporting a nose ring and blue hair. The irony was, that when he went off to college at, guess where, UC Berkeley, he lost the blue hair and the ring because he thought it made him look – like everyone else.

It was during this time I thought might be saying farewell to Robert in a more permanent way. He was home for spring break and came into our bedroom buckled over in pain. We rushed him to the hospital for a “routine” appendectomy. As we sat down the hall from the operating room, one of the nurses stuck his head out the door and said (too loudly) that he was not going to make it.

Robert had gone into anaphylactic shock in reaction to the anesthesia. His lungs filled with fluid, which were drained and he was taken to intensive care to see if his mom and I could help him to stay in this world by encouraging him to breathe on his own, despite the incredible pain. We took shifts all night.

I remember going into the little special room they had for loved ones, a spiritual room. I remember a conversation I had, well, more like a request. It became acutely clear to me that I was not in any way in charge of Robert's destiny.

I went back and took my shift in encouraging Robert to breathe on his own. My wife stayed with me. She took double shifts.

Sometime later, I shared with Robert my awareness from that. All my concerns, dreams, and expectations for him boiled down to just one request. "Please." I said. "I'd like you to keep breathing."

He seemed to be okay with that request and I am grateful.

Several years later, he experienced his own son's assisted breathing for just three days. A few years ago, I watched Robert cradling his son in his arms, as he left this world.

There are no words which come close to describing the Light in that hospital room as Robert's son passed on. Only poets seem to catch some particle of experiences like these. And Robert spent the next several years becoming the poet who could capture what Wordsworth calls, "thoughts that lie too deep for tears."

Robert continued to breathe. As the director of technology for a very successful consulting company, he did the work before him. He and his wife, Val, would come over every Wednesday night for several years, for dinner and backrubs offered by yours truly.

He completed his MFA in poetry, published, shared his poetry in many readings, loved his wife and family, and seemed to be doing quite well.

But, as I said earlier, Robert was not much for convention. He needed a challenge, and being married to a Londoner, he loved London. One day he announced at dinner that he didn't know how, but they would be moving to the UK.

His mom and I knew him well enough to know, this was not idle fantasy. Within months he had his work visa, and within a week after that, he had a job as the chief of technology for a promising startup company in London.

And when I say "fare well" to Robert in a few weeks, at the LAX international airport, I will remember that "fare well" means "fare thee well in the world," the world, I did my best to introduce him to. I will not be saying goodbye. In a poem to his deceased son Robert writes in the last line, "I will go on speaking to you as long as I live."

And I, Robert, will go on speaking to you, as long as I live. There simply is no way that you can ever leave my heart. Your Light beams too brilliantly in here.

Keep breathing.