

Joe and Joey,

6/14/2023

Thank you both for your thoughtful notes. There was nowhere else in the world I would have rather been on Saturday night than at 241 Royal Court with your family and friends. It was a beautiful evening, the highlight of which was the open share time. How courageous you were, Joey, to make sure that happened and for leading the way with authenticity. The food was fabulous (in particular, the “sub-grate” roasted vegetables) with everyone’s contributions. God gave us perfect weather. The grape leaves were huge and green. Your beautiful lot a chance for God to show off with the warm light of dusk and the shadows made by decades-old valley oaks. The most compelling component, however, was the incredible mix of friends and family that assembled.

Oddly, Stacia and I don’t have very many couple friends we can both genuinely enjoy together. Seeing your vibrant social circle and — more notably — how positive and faith-oriented they all were was a beautiful snapshot for me, a reality worth fighting for in my own life. I was particularly impressed with the *young* people in the room—how willing they were to share and the love from which their words flowed. Their maturity. All the clear signs they’ve grown up in unconditionally loving environments. The kind I pray we’re at least in some measure, providing our boys. Your friends are wonderful people, Joey.

Joe, that Rex excursion ranks among my fondest memories of my adolescent years. I remember ridiculous largemouth fishing in at least 4 of the seemingly dozens of lakes on the property, not the least of which the one just down the hill from the house (the crawdad Rattletrap earned its reputation as a solid performer, but the newly employed purple Bass Buster beetle spin made those lakes the size of a barrel. I remember the cleverness of one of my first entrepreneurial exploits—harvesting mistletoe from the oak trees with Joey so we could clip small bouquets wrapped in red ribbon to sell during the holidays, and the resulting misery of the worst case of poison oak recorded in the history of man. I still shudder. I remember Rex’s 1940s WWII Jeep with the fold down windshield and padded roll bar/gun rest. I remember it having particularly awful shocks and brakes that squeaked almost as much as the seemingly hundreds of gates that needed to be negotiated while touring his paradise. I don’t recall Rex or Joe getting many, if any, of those gates. I remember bluffing and telling Rex that a 7 mm magnum was a cinch to shoot, and then puckering when he handed his to me. I took so long to pull the trigger that I can still hear Rex’s taunting as I wondered why I opened my big mouth. Again. I remember melting the barrel of my Roger 10/22 on the endless supply of ground squirrels around each bend, both thumbs raw from loading 10-shot rotary magazines. I remember good food from Lee and a bottle of Sky Cabernet Sauvignon you and Rex ended, making noises with each precious gulp. I even remember the alcohol content—14%, as you had said it out loud when you read the wine’s label. I remember how much it made us feel like men to be trusted with Mr. Lindsey’s quad, so long as we didn’t enter through that one particular gate, and then the misery of being found out by Rex. I guess quads leave tracks or something. I recall the devastation of realizing the only way I was ever setting foot on that ranch again was if I could convince his granddaughter, also a Kennedy Cougar, to date me. I remember realizing as a 13 year old that

owning my own piece of dirt, even if 1/1,000 the size of Rex's, would be a lifelong dream. It still is.

I love that you're using the video from the campfire. That was a very poignant evening for me. The miracle of then to you now spraying the vineyard in the morning is dumbounding. Praise God.

While emotional expression isn't something I'm normally shy about, I did feel embarrassed this time when I was sharing—just sobbing I was! On reflection, it's pretty simple—those special years being Joey's best friend represent one of the happiest seasons of my entire life. Well past some of my traumatic early years and way before the complications of shame, difficult marriage, and financial challenge. It was just pure friendship. Innocence. Trust. *Getting* each other. Not expecting any change from one another. Discovering so many things together. Being brought into an intact family with enough love for one more. I'm getting emotional again as I type. Definitely one of the sweetest chapters in my 49 years.

I love you both, and I eagerly await our next get-together.

Terel Beppu