

Les Allen's Attribution

Brooke Thomas

Below are two attributions to Les upon his passing

1. Is an outline of some words spoken at Les' Memorial Service at Camp Anderson, April 10, 2018.
2. Is a skit-like presentation at Rattlesnake Gutter Trust Annual Meeting June 10, 2018 in the Leverett Town Hall

1. Presentation at Memorial Service:

Today we have to endure the loss of Les Allen. But all the hurt and sadness must give way to the enjoyment of this most marvelous and generous human being.

A bit of history. Les inherited his position as head of the recycling project from its founders the late Dave Field and Gordon King. Gordon, who recruited Les, was a magician in convincing others to get involved in his projects

In the good old days collected recyclables were piled in Gordon's barn. In time the heap got higher and higher, and when rats emerged from underneath Gordon got grumpy and we loaded up bags and took them to the Redemption Center in Belchertown.

Why it is called a Redemption Center eludes me. It sounds like a religious rehabilitation retreat. Dumping cans down a chute, however, hardly stands for a sacred act. It's not the cans but possibly their consumers that need this sort of attention. Maybe the guy who every week brings in two garbage pails filled with Bud cans - crushed and with 22 shots through them - should be talked to but the containers themselves remain innocent. Anyway that's what we do and don't ask questions least we be accused of being academics.

When Les took over as King of the operation he build a sorting and storage shed, constructed shelving, and set up 20 odd sorting containers. In this operation one has to separate by brand, and if

mistakes are made the redemption personnel become nasty threatening to bar any future deliveries. Only George Lockwood, who has now taken over from Les and volunteers every Sunday rain, sleet or snow, remembers how this really works.

Here's what we are up against.

- All Budweiser products go together along with Harpoon and Rolling Rock
- Coors can be sorted with Millers
- BBC goes in a separate container as do Trader Joe's and Whole Foods.
- And hard cider (Angry Apple) is not accepted but hard mango is.

And on and on it goes until by the end of the day the mind begins to freeze up, even in the heat of summer.

Les was always a pleasure to gab with. He knew all the gossip in Franklin Co. and had countless stories of jobs he worked or past experiences. But if one mistakenly slipped a Coke can into one of the 9 brands of Pepsi there was quick and firm condemnation: "shape up keep your eyes on the prize." I suspect he ran his kitchen that way. Keep in mind that similar sorting categories applied not only for cans with and without alcohol but was extended to glass bottles and different sizes of plastic containers. Just describing it makes my head spin.

The same went for pulling sharp tabs off of the can tops, a dangerous operation at best. Les collected these almost worthless bits of aluminum, bulked them up, and took them to the Shriner's Hospital in Springfield. There they were sold as scrap metal: the proceeds presumably went to helping kids with cleft palates, hare lips, and fused digits from burns. Heaven help the person who missed a tab. A confession: on bitter days when fingers numbed up making it difficult to even feel the tabs, and falling desperately behind because this slowed down processing, I'd NOT remove tabs for a whole sorting flat (24 cans). However, just in case Les would show up for a surprise visit I'd always stack a de-tabed flat on top of the incriminating one. Maybe it was I who needed redemption?

Les was on the job year round but conditions were especially severe in the middle of winter. Here are some contributing factors emphasizing his heroism.

-Since sun never shines on shed the fangs of cold wind extended even into the back room seeking out huddled volunteers

-A propane heater was installed to keep us warm but get too close and it has a voracious appetite, eating holes in nylon parkas.

-Les would stand in front of the heater warming his hands. These were held in front of his oxygen tank strapped around his waist with a feeding tube going up to his nose a mere centimeter from his brain.

-Consider, then, the explosive potential. The whole shed, maybe even the whole dump could blow, and then think of all the collectable cans we would have lost.

-To make things worse, if that were possible, Les was on blood thinning medicine so ripping sharp tabs off of cans with freezing fingers would probably not recommended by his physician.

-Finally, in the summer sparrows made nests in the rafters of the shed and he was allergic to their dander.

Despite all these constraints he forged on. But, this is what it means to be a "real" volunteer doesn't it?

Volunteering at the dump, however, had its benefits: every weekend from 10 am to 1 pm these are Leverett's finest social hours (really, are things that disparate?). Almost everyone one who arrived would "hi" to Les. He was a real culture hero. Jim Allen would also help out and on occasion would dive the dumpsters (feet sticking out) leaning over broken glass and sticky tomato sauce jars in order to salvage stray recyclable cans. It was like treasure hunting in the deep sea. This kind of heroism seems to run in the family

Les never wanted to join the RGT Trustees: "I don't like meetings." Even Town Meeting was deemed a waste of time although Terry was usually there.

In appreciation of his efforts, the highest honor the RGT can give is "The Royal Odor of the Dump." This was awarded several years ago on top of Long Hill at our annual meeting to both Les and George Lockwood. They were given exotic, decorated milk bottle crowns with ski pole scepters and golden can-top medallions hung around their necks.

With Les' passing a huge hole has been left in our collective recycling psyche. Our figurehead has passed away. Nevertheless the recycling shed just a stone's throw from his burial plot so in the obscurity of night he can stroll through the pinewoods and check if we've sorted cans properly and pulled all the tabs off of cans.

We'll try our best Les, and will miss you terribly.

Adieu,
The Trustees of the Rattlesnake Gutter Trust

2. "Les Allen A'rising," a fictitious depiction of his elevation to Heaven.

Foreword

This is tribute to the Life of Les Allen and his Wonderful Family.

Today we have to endure the loss of Les. But all the hurt and sadness must give way to the enjoyment of this most marvelous and generous human being.

An Explanation

This is a make-believe skit - a sort of Disneyland production - about Les's trip to the hereafter and how he may be coping.

A word of explanation. I don't mean to be offensive or flippant. This is an attempt to show how connected Les was to the community and all he did to make it a better place. I have checked out an abridged version with Jim and Terry Allen, and very much hope Les approves as well.

In sum this is a chance to insert fun into a deadly serious and sad topic. Humor usually plays this role by playing with our angst.

The Setting:

Here I employ, without any disrespect, the standard pop-Christian concept of the hereafter. As depicted there is a comfortable Heaven way up there, and a firey Hell deep downstairs below the cellar. If one is reasonably good they go to Heaven and knock on the Pearly Gates. There St. Peter greets you and either gives you a fun job, or as most like to think provides a poolside lounge chair with a martini.

What you might not have heard of is the first step in this process, the Salon de Selección.

The Sal, as they call it, is a large drab auditorium such as in the Franklin Co. Courthouse where one awaits jury duty selection.

-Attendees who have just passed away enter a turn-stile which spits out a numbered ticket like at the Registry of Motor Vehicles. The place is heavily bureaucratized, and stale, sweaty air pervades its every corner.

-Row after row of uncomfortable plastic seats fill up with folks who have just arrived.

-Up front is a long table with three rather grim hooded judges in black robes.

-Forlorn ushers in thread bare suits stand cross armed in front of two exits. One exit has an arrow pointing down and the other up. You can guess what they mean.

As numbers are called individuals timidly approach the front table. They present their case, along with assorted medals, diplomas, and letters of recommendation. The judges ponder this assemblage and then in unison, with a decided gesture, point to one of the exit doors.

This is a big deal decision requiring much debate at the front table so the line advances slowly, like a security line at a crowded airport when your plane is about to depart.

The attendees, in turn, fidget nervously in their chairs, staring vacantly at their tickets. Some make little spitballs out of them, others chew gum. Smoking, of course, is not permitted: it's bad for personal and public health

The TV playing an old black and white version of "From Here to Eternity" drones on: no one seems to be watching.

Tabs and a Decision

Les, who is fairly confident that he is destined for the Up Exit, is getting increasingly exasperated by the waiting time. As we know he's a guy who likes to get things done and not just dally around

Finally, he asks permission to step outside and returns with two big sacks of recyclable cans. He then starts to distribute them explaining that if folks remove the tabs they'll go to the Shriners Hospital to help treat kids w/cleft palates, hare lips, and fused fingers from burns.

People gladly accept these and seem relieved to have a chance to take their minds off to where they might end up -probably forever. Any way if the hooded judges see them participating it just may give them an edge

Finally Les' number is called. He collects the tabs in his small sand pail thanking everyone, and marches confidently forward plopping it down with a thud on the head table, whereupon he begins to present his case. It's hard to overhear exactly what is said but "--volunteered for this and for that" is heard over and over."

After a few minutes with laughter and a hand shake from the judges he is escorted to the Up Exit. Attendees throughout the Salon clap. The heavy Up door swings open to the outside onto a large cement slab painted red: this is the Launching Pad to Heaven. Brilliant floodlights almost blind him, and as his eyes adjust he notices a large crowd made up of all sorts of friends and family, some he hasn't seen for years.

On the Launching Pad

The crowd of admirers is made up of different groups he has volunteered for and in sequence they pay tribute to Les.

- The Select People and the Town Hall staff wave a huge a Leverett banner saying "Adios Les" as it flutters in the wind

- Food service folks he had worked with in the past from all over the Valley have prepared a feast of his favorite foods; chicken BBQ, honey buns, and a huge apple pie.

- Kids from Camp Anderson sing the "When the Saints Come Marching In."

And then join with children from the Shriners Hospital singing "Alleluia, Alleluia, Al-le-lu-ia."

- Rattle Snake Gutter Trustees rattle stones in soda cans, and throw shiny can tabs into the air. They glitter in the pulsating light.

- And for a finale the Fire Dept, having filled the pumper with bubble bath, shoot a fountain of water 30 feet into the air. Bubbles spew from the spray and float upward sparkling with rainbow colors.

Cheering and pandemonium breaks out.

And then an eerie silence settles over the crowd. An approaching red spot is seen on horizon. Someone remarks: "Maybe it's a comet coming forth to carry Les home?"

As it gets closer Les says with excitement: “That looks like Gordon King’s pick-up, It’s Gordon, it’s Gordon alright, I’m sure it’s him.”

The red pick-up truck pulls into the launching area and comes to an abrupt stop.

-(Les): “Gordon, my goodness, what are you doing here?”

-(Gordon): “Hey Les old friend, you’ve apparently been Keeping the Faith? Get in we’re going for a helluva ride”

Crowd waves good-bye, cheering wildly.

Heaven Bound

Gordon guns the engine and peels out laying a smoldering patch of rubber. Up, up and away the red truck climbs. It circles the crowd as Gordon waves out the window and Les blows a kiss to his beloved family below. The diminishing truck then passes over Brushy Mtn. and out into the great blue yonder.

On dashboard is a gallon jug of Gallo red with blueberries in it, a daily elixir Gordon drinks for longevity.

(Gordon): “Les, take a slug, this is going to be a ride of a lifetime.”

(Les): “Gordon, you shouldn’t drive and drink. Anyway don’t you recall I don’t touch the stuff?”

(Gordon): “Les friend, get a life – well, you know what I mean – it’s going to be different up here. All the state troopers are retired and there’s no speed limit.”

On and on they climb up through pink and magenta clouds doing four-wheel slides around giant cumulus updrafts. Finally as they enter a mysterious silver cloud out of the mist a parking sign is seen and they pull into the lot. A sign points to a yellow brick path advising “This way to the Pearly Gate.”

The Pearly Gate is indeed pearly. Les is in awe. Gordon knocks on the golden knocker and a bearded old guy with a shepherd's crook appears, just like in the movies.

Saint Peter

(St Peter): "Welcome Les, I'm St Peter. Gordon here tells me you're another good fellow from that little town of Leverett. I've also heard a lot about you from Dave and Carlyle Field as well. We all play Pinch together on Fridays".

(Les): They're up here as well? That's so great!

(St. P): "Yes sir, they've become my right hand men. Tell you what, how would you like to join our team? This place is falling apart. Most of the new arrivals just want to sit back on their easy chairs, read the bible and argue politics. The angels are dyeing their hair green and are petitioning for nose rings, and the cherubs all want iphones. Finally, 'gilt' (spelled 'g-i-l-t' and not the 'guilt' that those sinners down there have), is flaking off the arches and the food is monotonous."

So Les and his very good friends all roll up their sleeves and in unison said "Sure Boss, where do we start?"

Almost immediately back down on earth people began to notice a change. (This is in early April). The coldest of springs started to warm up, the skunk cabbage spread it wings, and early flowers dared burst their buds and became lovely blossoms: "a sea of lovely daffodils" was opening our spirits.

St. Peter, of course, was most pleased that his Heaven was shaping up. One day he approached Les with a question.

(St. P.): "Les there's something I'd like to know. I understand that you collected aluminum tabs from cans back in Leverett and took them to the Shriner's Hospital way down in Springfield.

L: Yes sir I did. Did it for more or less 10 years. There were lots of loads.”

St. P.: Now how much do you get for a tab and what is the price per pound of aluminum? Also, what’s the price of gas going back and forth to Springfield?

L: “I think I know where you are going with this Sir. The truth is from a cost benefit perspective we hardly break even but that’s really not the point. The point is that the Shriners are helping kids in a way that can change their lives, and by helping the hospital in just a small way I too can assist those kids. That makes me feel that I’m doing what I can to make a better world down there.

St. Peter smiled for a long while just staring at Les. In the end he said: “Amen Brother, Amen.”

RGT to Les

So we thank you Les! Come back and visit us at the shed. Conveniently our practical forefathers planned the cemetery and dump to next door to one another, possibly so the deceased could be close to their discarded possessions that their spouses made them throw out, or be the first to check out the “Take it or Leave it” shed. We promise we’ll try to do a better job on sorting, and from time to time will bring you over some can tabs in remembrance of the good ole days.

Conclusion

The take home message for all of us who still have some time left on the precious earth is to **volunteer**. Volunteering connects people and this connectiveness builds community. If one is unsure of a cause to join the RGT is looking for a few good recyclers. And if you sign up for the winter shift the chances are we can get you an easy pass up there to join Team Leverett. We do have contacts in high places.

“Keep the Faith.”