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Enjoy Every Sandwich



Alan Lubber

**July 19, 1951—
November 23, 2004**

*Shadows are falling and I'm running out of breath
Keep me in your heart for awhile
If I leave you it doesn't mean I love you any less
Keep me in your heart for awhile.*

—"Keep Me in Your Heart," Warren Zevon & Jorge Calderón

Today I lost the best friend I've never met.

Many of you who've been reading Alan Lubber's "Defensive Computing" column in *Smart Computing* may have known that Alan has been battling cancer for quite some time. On the morning of Nov. 23, Alan lost that battle, passing away quietly at home, surrounded by his family.

Alan was not just an excellent writer and a well-informed technologist; he was a warm, generous, likeable human being. And he was tremendously funny. Even during the terrible grind of chemo and pain, in the midst of what he knew was a losing battle, he could joke—often about himself. I used to look forward to my daily dose of emailed gibes, Web cam buffoonery, cartoons, and good-natured writer-editor banter, much of it—well, some of it, anyway—clean enough to be printed in a family magazine.

That was the thing about Alan. . . . Under circumstances that would have left most of us morose, disagreeable, and frightened, Alan always managed to cheer *me* up. I mean, how ironic is that? Compared to my friend, what problems did I have? My car broke down? I couldn't afford the digital camera I wanted? What are those, compared to staring death in the face? My daily battle was nothing compared to the war he was waging.

And the whole time, he was writing to his friends and colleagues, making us laugh, and encouraging us to enjoy our friends and family while we could. In emails and newsletters, Alan urged us to recognize the beauty even in (perhaps especially in) the ordinary, unremarkable, everyday things we encountered: a thunderstorm, a hamburger, a flower, a fine automobile, a well-thrown curveball. What he wanted us to do, in the words of singer/songwriter (and fellow cancer victim) Warren Zevon, was learn to "enjoy every sandwich."

And so, "enjoy every sandwich" became his sign-off. Occasionally, he'd change that to something more specifically related to whatever we'd been discussing: enjoy every Popsicle, every baseball game, every Beatles song, every joke. Enjoy your friends, your daughters, your wives, your husbands, your sons. Enjoy your doggie.

The funny thing about my relationship with Alan is that—as much as I liked him and as often as we communicated—I never met him. We'd exchanged thousands of words via email; I'd "spoken" (via email) with members of his family. We'd occasionally talk on the phone, but we never spoke in person. I never got to shake his hand, pat him on the back,

purposely fill his beer glass too full, never got to grin back at him grinning at me over some silly joke. My loss.

But how amazing that we were able to meet at all. We lived thousands of miles apart, had never seen one another, and yet we became friends. We live in an age in which technology—in the form of email, instant messaging, and the Internet—enables us to make new friends, keep in touch with old ones, and to locate those with whom we've lost contact.

I feel lucky to live in such an age and fortunate to have been able to count Alan among my friends.

I don't know if I'll ever understand how Alan could be so upbeat, so funny, and so positive during his illness. And so productive: In his last months, he wrote more—not just for *Smart Computing*, but also for other magazines—than ever before. He was determined to stay busy, to leave a legacy, and to enjoy the time he had left. I'm not at all sure that I could face the end of life as peacefully, as calmly, and as manfully as he did. I'm not sure I could find joy in a life about to be cut short.

But then, maybe that's the lesson to take from all of this. Life *is* short. Find ways to enjoy it, ways to forgive those whom we'd previously denied forgiveness, ways to make the most out of the brief time we're allotted. All of which boils down to this: We need to learn to *live* the way that Alan died.

Enjoy every sandwich, Buddy. ■

by Rod Scher

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