

# SPEAKER'S PLATFORM

## THE ARMSTRONG EXPERIENCE: MAKING A DIFFERENCE

by Doug Springer

I would guess that many people are here today for a wide variety of reasons. There is the Bradley student who is still in search of someone to straighten out the substitute that replaced George after George's recent return to the hospital --- because the sub isn't doing things the way George did them.

There is probably among us here a collectibles dealer who is looking for someone to sign for the delivery of the truckload of "collectibles" that George purchased at the flea market a few weeks ago.

And there are probably a few people here (restaurant waiters, hotel clerks, telephone operators, neighbors, nurses, university officials...) that think they were offended by George at one time or another, read in the Journal Star that he is gone now, and showed up today just to make sure...

These people all, at one time or another, had what the Journal Star termed yesterday, The Armstrong Experience.

From the Journal Star, "The Armstrong Experienced: compassionate, frightening, inspirational, opinionated," ...and that's a good start...

We must add to that:

caring, bull-headed (had written "obnoxious", and decided that would be politically incorrect, and then I noticed how ironic that was, trying to describe George and worrying about being politically correct...)

sensitive, loud (we have already heard his laugh described...his laugh could energize the stuffiest, polite gathering...);

devoted to detail (just look in his office...or in his garage...we have never seen more individual things in any one office, garage, automobile, or house...) and yet he was absolutely forgetful. George had a habit of remembering the things he wanted to...and especially remembering the things we hoped he would forget;

a loving, devoted, thoughtful husband and father and an absolute terror as a husband and father...

George like to mix it up, he like to dish it out, go one-on-one, provoke a reaction, incite a response; ...and he was charming, and delightful, and entertaining, and engaging, and smart.

He was one thing if he was nothing else. He was the professor, the teacher, the counselor, the person, the coach, who knew ABSOLUTELY how to get the best out of the people around him. And every one of us who knew him well at all, owe him for that. We are all different, because of that. We all think, or feel, or behave, or remember differently than we might have, because of that...

He was a recruiter, a promoter, a...chemist. I described him at his retirement dinner as a chemist, a chemist of people...able to bring together so many different sorts and types...neutralizing weaknesses, energizing strengths, and the results were powerful...

And then there are the stories. The Armstrong Stories that come from having had The

Armstrong Experience... At his roast, when he retired I got to tell some of my favorites. Everyone here has stories that are there favorites...

On Sunday, after hearing of George's death, I called Gary Roberts in New Orleans. He was one half of George's Bradley team that won the national championship in novice debate when he was a freshman... Bradley class of 1970...he's Vice Dean of the Law School at Tulane University now. I said, "Roberts, we will never forget the stories." He replied, "I still tell them!! Especially the driving one's..."

George getting out of a speeding ticket by telling the officer he had diarrhea. Stopped for speeding three times within one hour on an East Coast debate trip...in three different states. Getting a ticket on the way to Safe-Driving School.

And the stories continued as he finished his last week.

He made the nurses cry at Saint Francis. They said that they have never had anyone talk like that to them before. Kim Armstrong told them that that is what Bradley freshman have been saying for years... George told his daughters he regretted all the time that had been spent arguing over the years. They said, "That's ok Dad, no hard feelings." George's reply, "No, I don't mean I feel bad about the arguments, I feel bad about all the time that was wasted." And when Jay Glatz and I happened in the hospital last Thursday, we thanked George because he had been responsible for getting our first jobs. George had been in and out of sleep and through closed eyes after a pause said, "THAT was a mistake."

George Armstrong was a speech coach and George Armstrong was a debate coach, and I would like to think that both speech and debate coaches are special people...because I am both...but only and entirely because of George.

In competition we learn that it is not whether we win or lose, but how we play the game. Well, we have suffered a loss now, so how do we play the game? Whether we live a long time or whether we live a short time, we all would like to believe that we made a difference.

George Armstrong made a difference...

He made a difference to his friends and his family, to Bradley, to Peoria, to his colleagues, and to the national forensic community. Gary Dreibelbis reports that already George is being spoken of as a legend in American college/university forensics...and most probably

The Legend in American college/university forensics. And most of all to his students...he has made a difference for over thirty years.

He makes a difference to us now at this very moment, his chemistry has mixed us all together at least one more time...he will make a difference to every one who has been here today.

A good coach knows a paradox: (I got this from Dick Versace when he first came to Bradley as Head Basketball Coach. I don't remember if George even liked Dick, this may be a mistake...) the paradox is that we can never accept losing, but that we must always accept losing...

While we cannot accept this loss, we must accept this loss.

So in our grief, those who have had the Armstrong Experience, where can we find comfort? Something I have said to

my teams over the years when facing the agony of a loss is simply this: If winning wasn't so important then losing wouldn't be so painful. If George had not been so important to us all, then this would not be so painful now.

So in our grief, what can we say to George?

"Someone will get the instructions to your Bradley student's class. Someone will sign for the truckload of "collectibles". And we will explain to anyone who has been offended that that is part of the experience...

And we must say,  
"We love you... We cherish your memory... We think you for the experience... And George, please know one thing for sure, ...you made a difference..."

*(Doug Springer, NFL coach at Pe-kin, (IL) HS, delivered this great eulogy at the funeral of Bradley University coach George Armstrong. Rostrum is proud to print notable speeches.)*