



Remembering Richard Blackmer
By Al Schneider

Richard and I were good friends for almost 30 years. His passing away last week affected me deeply. It's tough to lose a good friend. All who knew Richard will miss his congenial attitude toward life and his selfless manner of dealing with others. He was one of a kind.

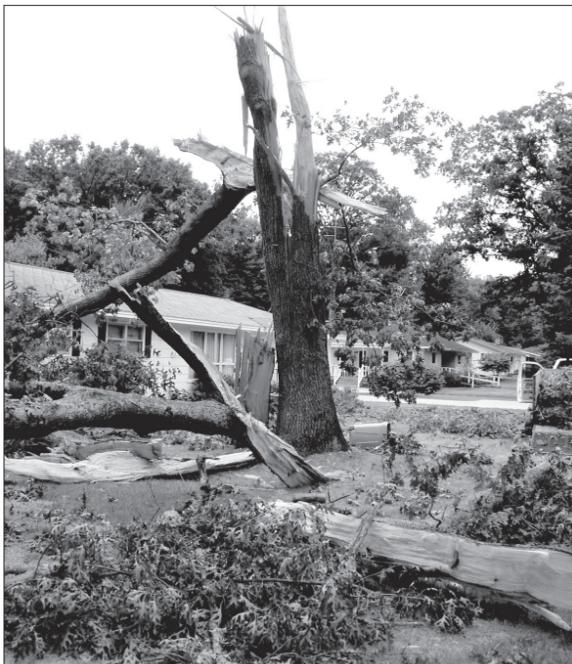
Who would guess that Richard and I would first meet at a Church of the Nazarene campground south of Kalamazoo? We were there to attend a writer's conference. At the outset of the conference, we attendees were asked to stand and introduce ourselves. I was surprised when a handsome gentleman introduced himself and stated that he was from Grand Haven. He was equally surprised when it came my turn. Two hefty guys, both of us from Grand Haven. We talked briefly during the first break, little knowing that the encounter would develop into a lasting friendship. Should anyone wonder, neither of us were members of the Nazarene Church. Nor did either of us ever make it back to visit the campgrounds. We had that one opportunity to meet.

During those early years, our interest in writing was the glue that bonded us. Wherever opportunities to improve our craft presented themselves, there you would find us. During these chance meetings, I became aware of Richard's deep faith. On at least one occasion, we met with a modern writer whose language was (to us) shocking. I recall Richard telling me that he would destroy the objectionable manuscript that was given him for fear that some day his "grandchildren might discover it." We discovered that there are writers of many stripes in our world and even in our own community.

An opportunity came for me to serve as copy editor for the Fruitport Area News. It wasn't long afterward when I underwent heart surgery. I was able to recommend Richard to replace me during my hospitalization. Richard turned out to be a valuable employee and remained on the job long after I returned. We spent many happy years working there.

Slowly I became aware of my friend's serious medical problems. I learned of his Leukemia along with numerous related health issues. He bore these matters in silence. Most of the time, no one knew. He never complained. What concerned him most was how he might be of help to others. I never met anyone quite like that.

Neither have I met anyone quite like Rachel, his wife of many years. She will miss him more than the rest of us. Rachel will be lonely now, though rich with a lifetime of beautiful memories.



Howard Jones and John Sawin and their families had a dynamic awakening about 5:00 a.m. Monday, September 9th. Lightning struck and blew apart a large tree between their homes at 2711 Pontaluna Road, but on the Jones' property. Fortunately for both, it did not do major damage to either home or themselves. It did get their hearts pumping a little harder which they were able to handle. (Photo credit to Ron Cooper)

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