

Farewell (In Memory of) ***Tyrone "Big Daddy" Rucker***

A Letter Read on *NewsRap*, to a Late Staffmember and Friend

November 22, 2005

Dear Tyrone,

Forty-two years ago today, we lost someone who meant a great deal to us and to everyone who values the potential of the human spirit—which you relished with delight! But we as a nation took the great grief from our sudden loss of President John F. Kennedy and applied it to achieve great deeds, from opening up new opportunities for people of all colors to opening up the New Frontier of space. Without such inspiration, I would have never pursued politics; would have never met Barry and appeared on *NewsRap*; would have never met you, Tyrone.

It's strange and wonderful how our lives are so interconnected. It is precisely that appreciation for the interconnectedness of all human beings that defined you to me, Tyrone: I never met anyone who connected so immediately with so many people. Whether they appreciated it or not.

Forty-nine years ago this week, I came into this world. And it seems that with each passing birthday, I come to appreciate more the value of life—the miracle of being human and in particular, the love that gives our lives meaning.

Love begins and ends with caring. And Tyrone, I never knew anyone who cared more about people and their freedom and the justice that makes our lives rich and full and righteous.

Whether it was your weighing in with an opinion on politics that you had pondered so long and hard, or your literally jumping for joy when a caller was laying into the powers-that-be for racial or other injustice, or your laying into a caller who you didn't feel was taking responsibility for their life as you had (pulling yourself up from the depths of poverty to a position of respect by virtue of your years of hard work and determination), or your using humor to blow tensions in the office all out of proportion in order to put them into perspective and thus blow them away, or your getting so upset about all the crap and corruption you saw in everyday life standing in the way of kids getting a good education or sick people getting the care that they need, or your worrying about your elderly mother and making sure that you and your family and neighbors saw to her needs (even more than you looked after your own needs, my friend), or your taking me under your wing and going way beyond the call of any duty to "show me the ropes" around the studio or set my fears of being on TV at ease or just talk at

length with me so openly and honestly about everything from the way things work "in the real world" to the way we men can make fools of ourselves for the women we love (including my girlfriend, who you helped me feel good about)—in so very many things, Tyrone, you always gave a damn about other people and not just about yourself.

Sometimes your doing and saying what you thought best rubbed people the wrong way—none of us is right all the time—but I never saw that stop you from being true to what you thought right. We bonded, Tyrone, in opposition to the pretense and hypocrisy we saw in the world, as well as in sincere and mutual respect for one another.

A few days ago, you passed away, Tyrone, to a world where you don't have to worry about work, or injustice, or cholesterol, or other people's needs. I hope—I have faith—that you will from now on know that sense of freedom you described to me so vividly from your travels as a young man across the length and breadth of this country we both love, on your Harley.

Sunday, at church, I heard how Jesus promised to take to his side those who fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and tended to all those in need: What we do the least of our brothers and sisters, that we do unto Him. Tyrone, for all that you did to help other people—your organizing and delivering carloads of donations to the victims of the hurricane leaps to my mind—and all you did in your "larger than life," "force of nature" kinda way, because you cared about others, I'm sure that when you reached the

Pearly Gates you gave Saint Peter a big ol' hug—like you did me just the other day—and he said, "Come on in, Big Daddy. Heaven is home for those with big hearts."

Rest in peace, my friend,

Doug