

In Memoriam

Intro to the Memorial Video, August 8, 2009

By this point in our lives, we have all, already, experienced too much grief.

Most of us have probably lost our parents.

Many have lost a brother, a sister ...

Some of us, our husbands, wives, partners ...

Sadly, a few of us, our children ...

And all of us, too many friends.

Tonight we'd like to take a few minutes to remember those long-ago friends we knew in high school.

For the past month, Sheila Ballard Millage has done an extraordinary job to create this memorial video, first learning how to do it from scratch, and then reconfiguring it over and over as other names and photographs reached her. I helped a little, and working on it was, for both of us, the pleasure of time spent with friends. There will be, unavoidably, some of our classmates we have misplaced, and for this, we ask your forgiveness.

For me, three of these people were my special friends, and so it has been with a heavy heart that we worked to honor all of them. But throughout all of this, it remains the fact of Mary Rose Hutchinson's death mere weeks before we graduated that has set the tone for my own personal grieving ever since. Because of Mary Rose, I learned to grieve and grieve well, and this was no small gift. Three years ago, I was graced with the chance to spend time with Tom Currie, and I found him then – as he was in all of his life – so beautiful in his dying. I read words from Shelton Perrigan recently expressing similar sentiments learned through the death of his twin brother, Steve.

This memorial ... we knew these people, and the truth is, their deaths shape us now as their lives did when we were young.

As we were working, Sheila said to me, "I picture the video playing, and people rising from their seats to dance." Our presentation is not designed to make you sad – but to celebrate the lives of our old, old friends.

I have a funny little belief – that after we die, whenever someone thinks or speaks of us, perhaps we get to hear, almost as if we are transported into this present moment. I'd like to believe, then, at least for the next few minutes, that the friends we find ourselves remembering will be right here with us tonight, and they will be remembering, too.

–Christi Payne