

What can I say. Donnie had a heck of a life – cut way too short. But he made the most of the years he had. He was so very exciting to be around; he could raise your spirits with just a word, a gesture, or a smile. He was a charmer. He was also a determined (stubborn) man, a wheeler-dealer, and a hard-working, smooth-talking showman. Which is how he earned high honors from Michelin and became one of Mr. Tire's top store managers. And also why I would run hide when he had a bone to pick with customer service.

Donnie excelled at life. He didn't allow anything to get in his way. Not even cancer pain and serious medical issues. This is not something new. Those of you who knew Donnie in his wrestling days at T.C. may recall his foot surgery that left him in a cast. You may also recall watching him play very effective basketball in that cast. The most recent example takes a bit more telling. Several months ago, Donnie had struck up a conversation with a woman in a NASCAR jacket when he and his Mom were at Denny's. In January, I got a call from her. I gave Donnie the message . . . at the hospital. He told me to call her back and get the tickets. To the Daytona 500. I never could say no to Donnie, so I did. His Mom said what I was thinking though – are you nuts? Did I mention he was stubborn? He got released from the hospital about a week before the race, and we went on our adventure . . . snowed in in South Carolina, and frozen out by the red-flag delays. But he was there for NASCAR's premiere race and had walked the track at Daytona.

But just as he ignored his own ailments, he had compassion for others in need. When his Grandmother Dorothy broke her arm, he moved in with her to take care of her. And one of the things that I think kept him going these last few months was making sure that his Mom was OK. Donnie was one of the most selfless people I've ever known. Even when he was told by his doctors he had 6 months – maybe 2 years if the chemo worked – he was making jokes to lighten the impact so that I wouldn't be worried. Who knew the doctors would be so wrong, that instead of 6 months, it was more like 6 days.

I'd like to quote from a note I received, recalling when Donnie & I got married: "It was the most beautiful wedding any of us had ever seen, televised or otherwise (take that, Royal Family!), but especially to have had the privilege to attend, along with the charming reception that followed. (Go Moose!) It seems like so short a time ago, yet it had come to feel that he was and had always been an important and well beloved member of the family."

And that summed up Donnie too – an important and well beloved member of many families, including families of friends.

He gave so much of himself, that he will never be gone. He will live on in our hearts, in his children, and in the memories of all those he has touched. I feel truly blessed to have been a part of his life.