**EULOGY FOR JOHNNY VEE**

**SPEECH FOR**

**RICK BERNIER**

Hello everyone. I have so many questions and thoughts running through my head as I try to deal with the passing of my best friend, business partner, and comrade, Johnny Vee, like..... Who would have ***ever*** thought that walking into a grocery store on the South Side in 1978 would bring me the best friend a man could ever hope for? I mean, I went in for a loaf of bread ***(or say container of milk, orange juice-whatever simple thing you walked in for)***  and wound up with a best friend for life!?!?! ***(Wait for the laugh***). I want you to know that I don't mean to be flip or casual because we all know how much Johnny meant to each one of us, and how much his every day presence in our lives will be sorely missed, but as a tribute to him, and to make sure he really lives on in all of us, I want all of you to know just what he meant to me. The man I met that day was passionate about life. He was a proud Vietnam War veteran and believed that it was the American soldier to whom we all owed a tremendous debt of gratitude for preserving the American way of life. Johnny was outspoken in his love for this country and he wasn't shy about voicing his political beliefs... And just as he was proud and patriotic, he was just as impassioned with his friends and family. No one that knew and had the privilege to call him "friend" ever had a reason to feel alone. If he was your friend, he was there for you. PERIOD. And he shared his kindness, loyalty, generosity, opinions, love and humor in obscenely generous doses... Not necessarily in that order!! Johnny had a gift- well, actually he had many gifts, but when I think about him, all I can do is smile. I don't know how each of you feel, but to me, that's quite a rich legacy.

As I you can imagine, Johnny and I spent quite a lot of time together throughout the years, in fact, the plan was for us to retire and move down to Florida so that my wife Allison and I and our family could be close to him in our retirement years. ***(If you want to keep it a little light you can say***) As you all know, Johnny "cleaned up" really nice and we'd go on many trips and adventures together, and whether it was joining my wife and me on several Southwestern Airline softball tournaments, going on Caribbean cruises, or just getting together with our crowd of friends, he was always a big hit with whomever he met. From our escapades on Rush Street to our Florida vacations, from baseball games to hockey games, every moment spent with Johnny Vee is unforgettable.

And as we grew older, we realized the curve balls witnessed in the sports we loved to share became symbols of the ones we were actually experiencing in life. We were able to get through those tough times because we had each other and we found our way through the tough spots with his special brand of humor and nonsense, but there were some points we didn't always agree on.... Like I would have preferred that the Cubs had to deal with pretty tough curve balls while he wished the White Sox would have to dodge more of them, but even in that rivalry, we found common ground in our friendship as we managed to share the joy of watching those two teams duke it out.

John and I became as close as friends could possibly be, and to us, we were like brothers. I know that he had a profound sense of just how much we cared about him. He knew that when times got tough, he had his good buddies ***(do you want to name some?***) like \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to see him through, and it was our privilege to be there for him, no matter what, because let's face it, he was **ALWAYS** there for us. He was our guide and our confidante. He was our voice of reason and our ring leader. He gave truth and meaning to the term, Master of Ceremonies. He was a **MASTER** at being an honorable, compassionate and true friend.

About five years ago it became clear that lifestyle changes need to be made... And QUICKLY made, and Allison and I were there to expedite a speedy and efficient move, lest he be convinced to not do something he really needed to do. His destination was Melbourne, Florida, or as he liked to call it, "Paradise." He loved to have visitors in Paradise... And they loved being there with and for Johnny... I mean, who wouldn't love it? Great weather, even better company, and of course the real attraction was to be co-hosted by Truman, Johnny's beautiful, loyal, black Lab. Lucky man...lucky dog...His life in Florida proved to really be a paradise, one in which he got to relax, enjoy a cigar or several, be surrounded by his guitars and most of all, he got to be reunited with his white Corvette. The universe provided that paradise to a man truly deserving of comfort and peace.

In the end, the tragedy was that he died too soon, but Truman was there by his side and there is no doubt in my mind and heart that Johnny's wish was granted. He wanted to be loved by his friends and family and I know I can speak for all of us when I say that John was truly loved like no other. He touched our hearts and minds and he will live on in all of us. John, you were really one of a kind and we will always love you, miss you, and be inspired by the gifts of all of the memories, humor and wisdom you shared so freely. Johnny Vee...Patriot, Friend, Brother, Master.... Thank you.