

ROBERT "KOOKIE" VIALPANDO - 7/18/1948 - 12/4/2014

Hi everyone,

I wanted to let you know about Bob's celebration last Saturday. Over 250 people filled the church, spilling out of the church into the reception area. Ten minutes before the service started we played Michael Franti's "Sound of Sunshine"; Louis Armstrong's "What a Wonderful World"; and Israel Kamakawiwo 'ole 'Iz's "Somewhere over the Rainbow", Bob's favorite songs. Tables outside of the church in the reception area were slide show pictures of your 40th reunion and picture albums of Vietnam when you all were 19 & 20 years old, along with music from "Good Morning Vietnam".

Pastor opened up with a welcome. Then Elvin, a Native American from Shiprock Indian Reservation, played a hand drum and sang an "Healing" song in Navajo. There were two bible readings from Isaiah 40:28-31 (talked about rising above on Eagle's wings which Bob felt he could do and loved watching), read by our daughter, Devonne's father-in-law; the second reading is from Isaiah 58:7-11 (talked about feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, and clothing the naked which Bob did all the time --- most our married life we had someone living with us who needed help) this was read by his childhood friend from Rocky Ford Ken Gallegos.

Pastor did an excellent sermon talking about wrestlers and Bob always there for the "underdog". The VFW read a poem, provided taps and the 21 gun salute, then presenting me with the flag. We played a Native American flute rendition of "Amazing Grace" along with a slide show of wolves, mountains, and eagles – all of which Bob loves.

We wrapped up with Elvin playing the drum and singing a "Traveling" song for Bob's soul to help travel in the other world. It was so, so moving and amazing. On a side note, after the service was over, Elvin told me that he felt a slight breeze come through the church around the time military honors were being done. He said he felt Bob's presence and saw him standing behind the VFW gentleman.

We all went into the parish hall – at least 200 of us, gathering our food, and one of Bob's Native coaches from the Shoshone Bannock reservation, Pocatello, ID read Bob's eulogy. Then George Usinowicz from the 22nd Infantry, combat engineer platoon '68-'69, read your stories. George was able to read your stories with such feeling since he knew what you all did and experienced. George also was chosen to read his writings about the Vietnam war experiences on Veterans day 2014 at the Vietnam Women's Memorial in which he dedicated his readings to Bob "Kookie". Bob's name was announced aloud at that Memorial celebration.

Many others told Bob stories from various aspects of Bob's life. The Celebration started at 10:30 a.m., and we cleared the reception area at 3:30 p.m. only because we had to leave the church. So many people wanted to share their stories.

Bob's and my family and close friends came back to the house at 4:30 p.m. and we continued to share family stories until 9:00 p.m.

All of this was so wonderful. I have had more people tell me they have never experienced such a unique and wonderful Celebration honoring anyone. People who may not even have known Bob very well, felt like they got to know him and were deeply moved. I have an audio CD of the service I could copy if any of you would like it. Let me know.

Here is a question to all of you. I want to update his website. Would you have any objection to me posting your stories on his website? I will add the brochure and other stories that were not read at the reception. Many more people would have liked to come to the Celebration and were not able to who do want to read some of the stories. Please let me know about that, too.

I hope you are doing well. Thank you for sharing your stories, contacting me, and your gifts. I cannot tell you how all of this means to me. My fear, of course, is with Bob being gone from this earth, you all will never contact me again. Even though we do not know each other, I feel I do know you because Bob talked often, all these years, about you. You have become part of my life too. Please remember me as you think of Bob.

Hope to hear from you soon, especially letting me know if I can share the stories.

Thank you again,
Dian

