

**Remembrance and Eulogy of David Panella**

**Regretfully written by Andrew Van Kuren**

**Delivered 10:45 A.M., November 17, 2005**

**At Our Lady of Good Counsel Church, Endicott, NY**

Please bear with me today and please be patient. I really struggled with this. What can I say to relieve your pain? How can I do justice to David's life? I'm his best friend but so many of you knew David, the worker, the foreman, the responsible parent, the cyclist, the black belt and most of all... your friend.

One sunny morning in June of 1990, I was following the pace car at the Strawberry Festival bike race in Owego. I looked to my left and there was a big stocky guy. We struck a conversation and introduced ourselves. Oh, your David Panella, I've heard about you from the other guys in the club! We were following the pace car, right on it's bumper. Our instructions were that when it slowed and pulled over to the right, the race is to start. As we neared the Montrose turnpike climb, the pace car slowed. Dave and I looked at each other and said, let's go! We charged up the climb with 100 other racers in tow. Suddenly, we heard the pace car come charging up from behind and Abe (our club president and driver at the time) yell at us, "You don't pass the \*!\*\# pace car!!!"

That was the beginning of our friendship. What a friendship it is, full of similarities (our boys the same age, love for cycling) and differences (disco vs. hard rock ... blue collar vs. button push'n office boy!). We both took classes at night to better our financial income, we were both driven to grow as people. What a loyal friend Dave was ... to all of us. He was more protective of his friends than he was of himself.

People were drawn to him. We were at a race in Whitney Point one day. We were in the staging area when two young boys slipped under the ropes and came over just to shake his hand. He didn't know who they were, there were hundreds of other racers there ... yet they had to shake only Dave's hand. He was cool! Wasn't he??!!

Mr. and Mrs. Panella, you did a great job with your son. He was so compassionate and very considerate of other people. Here's a man battling for his life and he would ask, "How are you doing? He always wanted to talk about you! How you were feeling? What is it that you're up to? What are you doing? He was so considerate and it aggravated him when other people were rude. Consideration and compassion, Mr. and Mrs. P., I believe he got those qualities from you. Both of you have been at his side since the first day he was diagnosed. You drove to Boston and where ever else you needed to go. You did what you felt that you needed to do. I see where he got those qualities from. You did a really great job. You were so important to Dave.

Dave once told me he would use humor to break the tension or a stressful moment. I think there must have been a lot of stressful moments then! How about his sense of humor? I can't do his sense of humor justice. He was so funny at times my jaw would lock-up and my stomach would cramp. Dave, Dave Morgan (Little D) and I were out on a training ride one day over by Day Hollow Rd. We took a little side road, we weren't going too fast and Little D and I were about 50 yards ahead of Dave. Two big Irish Setters came out of a barn, barking and running right at us! Little D and I took out our water bottles and were ready to protect ourselves ... when both dogs ran right past us like we didn't even exist! They ran over to Dave and started doing circles around him. What are we, chopped liver? The dogs owner came out and called them over. We regrouped and started riding down the road. I looked at Big D and said, Man those dogs ran right past both of us. Dave said, "Yeah Gerb, they wanted real meal not a little snack!" He would make fun of his cancer. Better be careful Gerb, that might give you cancer! Mr. P. Dave and I stopped at a diner one time. He wasn't feeling well but he made jokes about it. When we were in Philadelphia our team manager, Ron Livingston, insisted that Dave use sun screen. Dave said, "Oh yeah, I better use it. I might get cancer!"

He'd laugh in the face of cancer, mock it. He made it easy for all of us to deal with his cancer. How stubborn was this man? I bet there's not a person in this room who didn't believe that Dave wasn't going to beat this thing. Just like Hiedi and Tony said last Monday when I was with them. Wasn't there a piece inside you that said he really can't be gone? We were out on a long training ride one day. This is when he lived up on Bunn Hill Road. He was cramping and could barely pedal. I tried to push him and he yelled at me. I chose a few select words about his stubbornness. Back and forth we went, firing insults at each other! You know, he made it all the way home just by sheer will and strength.

Strong! David was not only strong mentally, he was so strong physically. Those who worked with him and competed against him can testify to that. Dave would get frustrated at times because he said he was a real climber trapped in a big man's body. I would drop him hard at times on the climbs but he would make me pay on the flats. I'd get next to him and he'd click up a gear. I'd look at him, click up a gear myself. Then he'd click up another. I'll see your gear and raise you one. Then click, click, click!!! We'd be sprinting and we were still five miles from home! One time we did a time trial together over on Rt. 79. It was like a grand prix style, two riders teaming up. We started out and Dave was hammering. He'd call for me to come through and I'd take my pull then he would just kill when he got back up front. Long story short, he dropped me by the third mile! He passed another rider and they informed him that he lost his partner. He slowed down and started yelling at me, "You should of said something!" As I gasped for air and said, "right!?" Oh, he was mad at me that day. He didn't speak to me the rest of the night! The next we rode together and got a good laugh from it. But when I was behind him he was just cranking out the power. Slightly going left to right, it seemed that I would cross his wheel at any second. Something I didn't want to do. It was risky staying on his wheel at that time.

Life is full of risks. Risk of driving, walking across the street, risk of driving our cars, risks of racing our bikes... and yes, putting ourselves out there to love and care is a risk. Dave took a risk one day. I remember talking to him about it. Do I want to be a father? Do I really want to get married? How would it affect Ryan? Ryan and Thomas, he loves you both so much. He

worried about you guys more than you probably knew. Kim, Dave really did enjoy your family. Riding with Kevin, picking on your sisters and seeing your parents. Kim, you were his world. You did such a great job of taking care of him. You are a source of strength and inspiration to all of us, just like Dave was. You always welcomed me into your home. You never tried to get between our friendship, thank you for that. You also knew how much people loved Dave. You could have tried to hide him away, but you didn't. On behalf of all of us, thank you so much. Your strength, your love, your compassion and consideration of others mirrored David's. All these qualities would serve him and you well in his battle with cancer. Which in-turn inspires and teaches so many of us. Just look at how many lives he touched in such a positive manner. If everybody could be here that wanted to, but can't be here due to (work, travel, sickness) the church would be full and people would be standing outside. It mattered that David Panella was on this earth and we were privileged to know and love him. He gave us so much! We regret that we didn't have more time to give back to him, some of us didn't have the chance to tell him how much we loved him. Some of us wanted do more for him. Maybe to explain to him how we felt or why we were so scared.

But you know, in his own special way I think he knows all of this. In his own compassionate, considerate, caring and patient way ... I have faith he knows. God Bless David Panella and his family, friends and loved ones, Amen.