

2005

“BIG” JOHN SMIT

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“How many blondes does it take to change a lightbulb?”

I don’t know; but, John Smit, Jr. did know. He knew a hundred blonde jokes and may have invented several of them.

We met John Smit shortly after he and his wife, Pat, moved into Meadowbrooke subdivision of Summerfield Crossings in 1994.

A large, rotund, jolly man, John always had a quick joke or fun-filled story to share. And, he would share it — whether you wanted him to or not.

Rather loud, his volume and his size intimidated some, but his giving nature quickly won converts to the “Big John” Club. One could just not dislike John.

Over the years I learned a lot about John.

He was drafted during the Vietnam era, but got sent to Italy instead. There he served the remainder of his two years and returned to the States to seek his future.

For awhile he was a bus driver.

For awhile he was a financial consultant.

For awhile he trained financial consultants.

Yet, through it all, John remained John.

John Smit, Jr., was a big man, both in girth and in being. When he came into the room, joviality came in with him. He was loud; he was forceful; he was fun.

PegEgg and I would not consider throwing a party without inviting “Big John” because he added humor to any gathering — whether you wanted it or not.

Of course, when we invited John, we always invited his wife, Pat.

Let’s face it, Big John needed a lot of adult supervision.

Pat, his wife, was his anchor to reality.

Where John was boisterous, Pat was calm.

While John partied hard, Pat was the arm he leaned upon to make it home.

As John was the life-of-the-party, Pat's challenge was to keep him "off the ceiling."

When John got involved in projects, he entered them at full speed but made time for those who could not keep up. Cajoling and joking, he would encourage those who lagged behind to hurry up and to enjoy the project.

Big John was always looking for that next big rainbow — that "silver bullet" that would bring a brighter future. He never found that "good deal," but he never gave up looking for it.

John believed in "living large." Fortunately, Pat kept tight strings on their money, or John would have spent it all in another vain attempt to gain financial independence and fortune.

The Worldwide Web was created for Big John.

My fondest memories of Big John Smit, Jr., were his passion for the personal computer. He has his office arranged to permit maximum access to the Internet. He had a second phone line installed so that he could surf the Web for countless hours.

He was, forever, sharing jokes and surfing to one more great site to see, to explore and to share.

In the 12 years that I knew him, I spent 10 years getting emails from him. Blonde joke after blonde joke came roaring across my screen every morning, noon and night. When I didn't get a joke from Big John, I knew he was too ill or incapacitated to go up the stairs to where his personal computer was located.

Unfortunately, his inquisitive nature often got him into trouble with his personal computer. He would see a program that looked good, download it and install it. Only after his computer crashed — again — would he realize that he should have been just a little bit more cautious.

In November of 2004, Big John began to have problems with his equilibrium. If he bent over, he would fall.

Visits to the doctors revealed no cause for it.

Then, in January of 2005, his entire right side began to go numb. The doctors assured him and Pat that it was not a stroke; nonetheless, they had no idea what was causing the complications.

He went to doctors at the Veteran's Hospital (VA), Tampa General Hospital and University Hospital. All concluded that it was not a stroke, but the VA concluded that he had neurological damage and scheduled more tests for three months later.

By this time, John had deteriorated to the point that he had to be placed in a nursing home near Brandon High School. By now, although he was given physical therapy, he was rapidly deteriorating. The staff concluded they could not help him and sent him home.

Once home, a physical therapist was assigned to visit with him. It was the physical therapist that alerted John's wife, Pat, that something was drastically wrong. With physical therapy the patient should get better; John was getting worse.

So John was taken to Tampa General by ambulance.

It was there that the doctors diagnosed him as having ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease. However, at this point, he was too far gone for medical aid, beyond the comfort of mind-numbing drugs.

So, John was sent home.

Later that day, John told a good friend of ours, Marsha, "They sent me home to die."

Within days, John could no longer talk. By then he had lost all motor skills. Although his eyes were moving, as if he were fully aware of all his surroundings, he could no longer communicate, feed himself, or relieve his bowels.

A few days later, John Smit, Jr., died.

In the days immediately following his death, the weather in the Tampa Bay area deteriorated. The weatherman said there was a cold front coming in from Texas, but I knew better.

A few days later the weather returned to the calm, sun-filled days that are the signature of this area of the world.

The evidence was plain, the facts conclusive.

In John's first days in heaven, he was rearranging the furniture so that he could better access the *Galaxy-wide Net*.

Once that was done, he settled in for eons of satisfied surfing.

Do not be surprised if, when you get to heaven, you witness a large crowd of angels laughing riotously.

You'll discover that they have just discovered the answer to the question: "How many blondes does it take to change a lightbulb?"