

**Dr. John Naysmith**

**A Forester of Love**

**A Tribute**

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Delivered at Dr. Naysmith's Celebration of Life

October 28, 2017

Avila Chapel, Lakehead University

When I think of John Naysmith, the first thing that comes to my mind is his smile.

A kind smile,

A friendly smile,

A compassionate smile,

A smile full of wisdom,

A smile that disarms you,

A smile that makes you feel safe,

A smile full of love.

When I think of John,  
I think of his handshake  
I can feel his grip.

His warm hand holding mine, firmly, but  
gently, not letting go right away.

As if to let you know that this handshake  
means something,

As if to let you know that this is not just a  
greeting,

it is probing,

It is purposeful,

It is inquisitive,

It is interested.

As his hand lingered, it embraced your hand.

He let you know that you were important, not because you might have been important,

but because you were important to him.

And if you were important to him,

well, then you felt important--

you were indeed important.

You were loved.

When I think of John, I think of his warmth.

A warmth rooted in curiosity,

A warmth rooted in caring,

A warmth rooted in empathy,

A warmth rooted in affection,

A warmth rooted in love.

All of these qualities manifested themselves in his many acts of kindness.

In his extraordinary need to make others happy.

And in the desire to share his happiness.

Last winter, for example, John came to our home to deliver a thank you card after Judy

and I visited with him and Toie. He didn't mail the card, he made the extraordinary effort to bring himself with the card.

He braved a recent ice storm, slippery sheets of ice on our driveway and a mountain of snow on our as yet unshovelled front door staircase.

Like Sir Edmond Hillary, climbing Mount Everest for the first time, he overcame all challenges to deliver the card, holding on to the handrail as if he were holding a trekking pole, as the wind and the snow blew all around him, climbing with no concern for his own well-being or safety.

To deliver a note,

Of thanks,

Because he wanted to give thanks,

because he wanted to show his appreciation.

This summer he made the same effort, minus the snow and ice, to bring an autographed copy of a book entitled *Dynamic Forest: Man Versus Nature in the Boreal Forest* by Malcom F. Squires, Forward by John Kennedy Naysmith, for my 13-year-old daughter Isabel, who had expressed to him her love of reading.

I think that he was trying to recruit her to the Faculty of Natural Resources--never too early, he thought.

He was trying to give her a sense of awareness of the awe he felt for nature.

Again, his love, in this case for nature,  
drove him



But none of this should surprise you.

John was a forester.

John loved nature

Think about it.

What do foresters do?

They nurture trees,

They cultivate,

They cherish forests.

John already had an extraordinary career when he arrived at Lakehead University. Educated at the University of New Brunswick, at the University of British Columbia and at Harvard, which awarded him the Charles Bullard Fellow in Forestry Science.

John was a proud registered professional forester.

In the 1970s He was the Canadian government's Special Claims Representative for the negotiation of the Western Arctic Inuvialuit land and Rights Claim.

In 1985, John was appointed senior advisor to the Swiss Based International Union of the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources and project director for the development and writing of the National Conservation Strategy for Nepal.

But it was in 1988, when John became the Director of Lakehead's School of Forestry and subsequently Founding Dean of the Faculty of Forestry that he came into our sphere.

When he arrived at Lakehead University he applied all of these qualities and his considerable knowledge

to nurturing,

to cultivating,

and then to cherishing, for the rest of his life, the Faculty of Forestry and then the Faculty of Natural Resources.

His contributions laid the foundations for the extraordinary success of our Faculty of Natural Resources, one of a handful of faculties that remain in Canada to train individuals, to conduct research, and to advocate for one of our most precious natural resources, one of our Country's most important legacies and greatest trusts.

John was a giant in his field.  
As tall and majestic as the trees that he so much nurtured, cultivated and cherished.

John was full of life,  
full of humour and wit,  
full of love.

And speaking of love...

There are the pairing of names throughout history and literature that by their mere mention elicit an understanding of love,

of deep love,

of true love:

Helen and Paris,

Antony and Cleopatra,

Romeo and Juliet.

To this we now have to add a new, but superior, pairing:

John and Toie.

But unlike these historic pairings rooted in love and tragedy, John and Toie's love evolved for over sixty years and their devotion was made manifest in three wonderful children, their spouses, and seven beautiful grandchildren.

For all the time I knew John I was always  
constantly and immediately struck by what  
was the engine of his life,

by what gave him power,

By what gave him strength:

His love for Toie,

his beloved wife and partner,

the love of his life.



And like the good forester that he was,  
John realized that Toie was his tree of life,  
a majestic and beautiful tree of love,  
a tree that gave him meaning and purpose.

In the end, it is this love that defined him.  
It is this love that defined our relationship  
with him.

I know of one act, one of what must be  
countless number of acts of dedication to  
Toie, that is a material expression of this  
love.

This winter, when there was a pending ice storm, he decided to go and visit his beloved Toie, knowing the risks of getting caught in what we were all warned was going to be a terrible an paralyzing storm,

And, of course, when he tried to head home his car was completely covered in a think sheet of ice.

He was forced to spend an hour, in the freezing cold, scraping off the ice from his car windows.

But with every scrape, he said, “I love you, Toie.”

If John's life was anything, it was a story of Love.

Love for his beautiful wife Toie,

Love for his children, their spouses and grandchildren,

Love for his faculty and university,

Love for nature and our forests.

Love and kindness defined his life.

And what we should learn from it.

What we should keep in our lives as a gift  
from John,

as a testament to his life,

as a tribute to that life,

is the knowledge that if we can love as John  
did,

Our lives will become richer, better

So, that we can nurture,

So that we can cultivate,

So that we can cherish life, as John did.

So that we too can be foresters of love

As John was.