

Andrew Washburn

William M. Farmer

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Eulogy at the Funeral of Andrew Washburn George Washburn November 3, 2019

Thank you all for coming to the funeral of Andrew Washburn. I am George Washburn, the older brother of Andrew. I would like to tell you a bit about my brother — an amazing and rather mysterious person. He was a guy who was hard to get to know. It was even hard for me — sometimes months would go by without me seeing or even talking to him. I have always loved him, but I wish I could have known him better.

Ever since Andrew was a little boy (who we called Andy) he was obsessed with two things: water and sailboats. When we were little living in Michigan, our family had a three-foot deep above-ground swimming pool in the backyard. My sisters Jane and Michelle, Andrew, and I went swimming in the little pool nearly every day in the summer, even though the water in the pool, being unheated, seemed as cold as a pond in winter that was starting to freeze over. The girls and I would jump in and out of the pool and swim around for about an hour or so. Andrew, however, often would spend more than half a day in or near the pool. He never complained about how cold the water was.

It is not uncommon for little boys to be obsessed with toy cars or little girls to be obsessed with dolls. Andrew was interested in neither toy cars nor dolls. His obsession was toy sailboats, which he begged Mom to buy for him and which later he made from straps he found in the garage and basement. He also got Mom and Dad to buy him books about sailing for his birthday and Christmas. He was always trying to teach me stuff about sailing like why square riggers can't *come about* and must *wear* instead.

When Andrew was 11 he joined my Boy Scout troop, Troop 472. We were both looking forward to going to summer camp with our troop after school was over. It would be the first summer camp for him and the third

for me. Our troop went for a week to the local Boy Scout camp in June. Andrew and I had a great time. Andrew was able to do a lot of things that he had never done before — canoeing, rifle shooting, archery, Indian lore, camp fire cooking, nature activities, capture the flag, and other things that I can't remember.

But there was one thing he didn't get to do that he wanted to do more than anything: sailing. The problem was that the camp only had seven small one-person sailboats and there were almost 200 Scouts at camp our week. Not everyone had the opportunity to sail in them — and this unfortunately included Andrew. Although Andrew had a great time, not being able to sail was a crushing disappointment for him. After we got back home, he moped around the house, saying over and over again that he had lost the first and maybe only chance he might ever have to sail a boat. I was very sick of hearing about how cruel life was to him. I felt the urge more than once to push him down and hit and kick him a few times.

Fortunately, Dad stepped in and said Andrew and I would be going to Water Camp at the end of the summer! I couldn't believe my ears. I had asked Mom and Dad each of the last two summers if I could go to Water Camp, but they always said no because the family could only afford one week of summer camp for each of us. (Jane and Michelle got to go Girl Scout camp for a week each summer like us boys.)

Water Camp was a special week-long summer Boy Scout camp in which the participants go as individuals, not as troops. The objective of the camp was to get merit badges in swimming, life saving, canoeing, rowing, motor boating, and sailing. Yes, you former Scouts out there, I know what you are thinking: We would get SIX MERIT BADGES in one week! And, as icing on the cake, the Mile Swim Badge as well! At a normal summer camp, if a Scout worked very hard, he might be able to finish the requirements for one or at most two merit badges. But six merit badges in one week is like getting six board games, six books, and six bags of candy for Christmas.

During the week of Water Camp, Andrew spent as much time as he could sailing the sailboats. He tipped over several times on the first day, but by the end of the week he truly looked like he had been sailing for years. Andrew liked the other water activities, but he was utterly smitten with sailing. The mile swim event was on the last morning of the camp. Andrew got special permission to skip the swim and do some more sailing instead. I couldn't believe that Andrew was turning down a sure chance of getting the Mile Swim Badge. I tried to talk him out of his decision, but there was nothing I could say to get him to change his mind. I couldn't understand how a couple extra hours of sailing was more desirable than getting one of coolest badges there was to get.

Water Camp changed Andrew's life. From then on, sailing was always the most important thing in his life. He did other stuff and was a superb student, yet sailing was what he did whenever he could and what he thought about whenever he had a free moment. He joined a sailing club in high school and learned how to race sailboats, becoming quite a formidable competitor. As the valedictorian of his high school class, he had no trouble getting into the University of Michigan where he studied computer science. He was on the sailing team for four years, becoming its captain his senior year. He seemed not to be intimidated at all by the many members of the team who came from rich East Coast families and who had been sailing since they were toddlers. At his graduation, some of his sailing friends told me that he was the most skilled and the most knowledgeable sailor they had ever met.

After he finished college, Andrew got a great job in Detroit as a software developer which paid the really big bucks. Dad couldn't believe that someone with so little experience could be making so much money. He got an even better job a few years later in Lansing. Although he was making lots of money, he was spending very little and putting almost everything he made into retirement funds. He drove an old car and bought a tiny two-room house on a small lake that was connected to several larger lakes by channels. He bought a sailboat that he sailed every weekday on his own lake and raced every weekend on the larger lakes. But that was it. He owned nothing of any value beside his falling-apart car, his little house, and his sailboat.

Andrew's life changed very little until to the surprise of everyone he said when he turned 32 that he was quitting his job and wasn't going to look for a new one. We couldn't believe it. He said that he had \$150,000 in his retirement funds and, if he retired at the age of 65, this would grow to at least \$2,000,000 — plenty enough on which to retire. He said, from now on, he was only going to do consulting work that was really fun and paid lots of money. Dad thought he was totally crazy — I'm not kidding! However, Andrew's plan seemed to be working from the start. He did consulting work all over the country, and after just two years he bought a really nice sailboat he named Foxfire that was big enough for him to live on. He sold his house and moved onto Foxfire that was berthed on Lake Michigan at St. Joseph.

He continued doing consulting work, but he preferred to pick up work in places like Chicago and Milwaukee where he could sail to. When he wasn't working he sailed all over Lake Michigan and then later into Lake Superior and Lake Huron. Eventually he was doing sailing and consulting all throughout the Great Lakes and up and down the St. Lawrence River. He especially like consulting in Toronto and Montreal. For vacations, he took trips on Foxfire to Newfoundland and Maine and once all the way down the Atlantic coast to Florida.

Andrew always sailed alone. He had no pets, very few possessions, and very few friends. He told me that, if he had something he didn't need right away, he would give it away and buy a new one if he happened to ever need it again. In the last several years he stayed closer to home, sailing all over Lake Michigan, some times sailing just off the shore and other times sailing across the lake from east to west or vice versa. He especially loved to sail in the middle of the lake at night under a full moon.

I often had no idea where he was. It was quite a shock when we learned that his severely battered, mastless, much-loved Foxfire was found on the beach north of Grand Traverse Bay. His body showed up the next day on the beach north of Leland on October 26. He was 63 years old, far too youthful to have died at such a young age. It is clear that he died while sailing, perhaps in the big storm that crossed Lake Michigan on October 23. I am sure that Andrew would have said, if you asked him, that there would be no better way for him to die than on the water sailing.

Andrew, your family loves you dearly, and we miss you more than can be expressed in words. We will always think of you on Foxfire sailing at night in the moonlight, aglow on the water like foxfire aglow in the woods.

Postscript

George Washburn

September 17, 2020

In the last year I have learned many things about Andrew and his untimely death that I didn't know at his funeral. There were very few possessions left in Foxfire, his boat that washed up on the northern end of Lake Michigan's eastern shore. However, the boat had a waterproof compartment that contained his passport, maps, various papers, and a large sum of money — about \$40,000. On one map a large number of places on Lake Michigan were marked that included various sites, hotels, and diners.

My cousin Danny Washburn and I rented a sailboat out of St. Joseph and spent a month this summer sailing entirely around Lake Michigan and stopping at the places marked on the map. We met many people who knew Andrew. Some heard that he had died. Others heard that first from us. Many of the meetings were quite emotional. Andrew had apparently touched many people.

We met a man name Harold Pullman on Beaver Island who said that the last time he saw Andrew was October 23, 2019, the day when a bad storm crossed Lake Michigan. Mr. Pullman said that Andrew left the island approximately one half hour before the storm hit. Andrew apparently thought he could beat the storm to the safety of Grand Traverse Bay. Mr. Pullman tried unsuccessfully to convince Andrew that getting to the Bay before the storm hit was a risk that he should not take. Andrew replied that he was 100% confident he could make it. Mr. Pullman, who didn't know that Andrew died in the storm, was much aggrieved when we told him that Andrew's body was found on the beach on October 26.

In Marquette, Michigan we met a woman named Heather French who managed a diner that we learned Andrew frequented often. Ms. French knew Andrew quite well and had heard of his death. She said that they had lived with each other on and off over the last 20 years and that she wanted to marry him but he refused to discuss the possibility. I couldn't believe it. I never knew Andrew to have a serious girlfriend (or boyfriend). We also ran into a woman north of Chicago who was literally speechless after we told her that Andrew died in a sailing accident. She looked thunderstruck and ready to scream out. But she held in her emotions and asked us to leave.

Andrew left the world leaving behind very little except \$40,000 in cash, \$230,000 in bank accounts, and over \$3,000,000 in retirement funds. And far too many unanswered questions. It doesn't seem fair that there is so much I don't know and don't understand about someone I so much love.