

“Ode to Jerry Little”

By Lorelei Pepe

I never knew Jerry Little. But, when he was killed in a tragic motorcycle accident at the age of 41, I wish I had. I drove by the very spot he lost his life, a few times a day in my car, when I lived in Miami. I first came upon the scene a while after he was killed on that fateful day as I tried to return to my home. The street was blocked off with yellow tape and shut down to traffic with police cars surrounding all the blocks. I had to detour to get home and could not find out what happened, but felt it in my bones it was very bad. I could not get this scene out of my head for days.

A few days later, a small memorial began to build right by the palm trees and intersection where he died. The first thing I noticed on the small patch of land was a 3 foot wooden cross with his name scrawled on it, “**Mr. Little, WE LOVE YOU!**”. You could tell a child had done it and it made me sad.

During the following days, numerous notes, letters appeared tacked to the cross. Then the mountain of flowers began to sprout from nowhere! And balloons sailed high in the sky, “**We miss You!**” Then at nighttime there were small candles lit in fireproof containers that glowed as you passed by. Teddy Bears and little stuffed animals with notes pinned to their bodies appeared also. Each day much to my amazement it grew and grew!

I began to think more and more about Jerry Little. What kind of man was he? What was he like that could bring this sort of emotion and tribute to him? Then one day driving by I pulled over and got out as a photo was nailed to the cross. Now he became more real to me, a man with a nice face. Another time while I was waiting at the stoplight, I saw a man pull over with his young son and they got out of the car. They were holding hands and laid a bouquet of flowers at the cross and stood there quietly. I could not stop wiping the tears from my eyes witnessing this scene.

This memorial kept growing for a few weeks, and then a huge poster appeared one day. It had all of the kid’s, signatures and prayers to God for Jerry

on it. Then I realized from the writings these were the kids from the Claude Pepper Elementary School, right down the street and Jerry was their teacher.

A few weeks later while I was browsing through the local newspaper, I spotted Jerry's picture and obituary. It was then I learned that Jerry was killed instantly when a motorist who ran the red light, had knocked him off the motorcycle. A life cut too short. It seemed that Jerry was just a "regular" guy who made a big difference to a lot of kids. He seemed to be the bright light in their lives, although it went out way too soon. In the kid's eyes the article said Jerry was their "unsung hero" and had made a real impact with his teaching and at the school. I bet Jerry considered himself an ordinary man, but I hope he could see how the kids remembered him in an extraordinary way.

A few years passed and the memorial is long gone, but I will never forget that intersection. One day I looked up at the street sign and realized it had been changed and this was now Jerry Little Street! It made me smile. Jerry Little may be gone but he will never be forgotten!

After I wrote this story it reminded me of another man called Jesus. Here on earth for only a short while He touched so many lives, transforming young and old, men, women and children. Like Jerry, Jesus left an impact on the world... Today Jesus continues to transform and change people's lives through His word, the Bible and teaching. He is and was the Light of the World and lives in the hearts of each one of His believers! And that is the Good News!