



Remembering



Joseph L. Bilka

Antioch-Fishing Creek Volunteer Fire Department — North Carolina

Classification: Volunteer

Rank: Firefighter

Date of Death: May 21, 2006

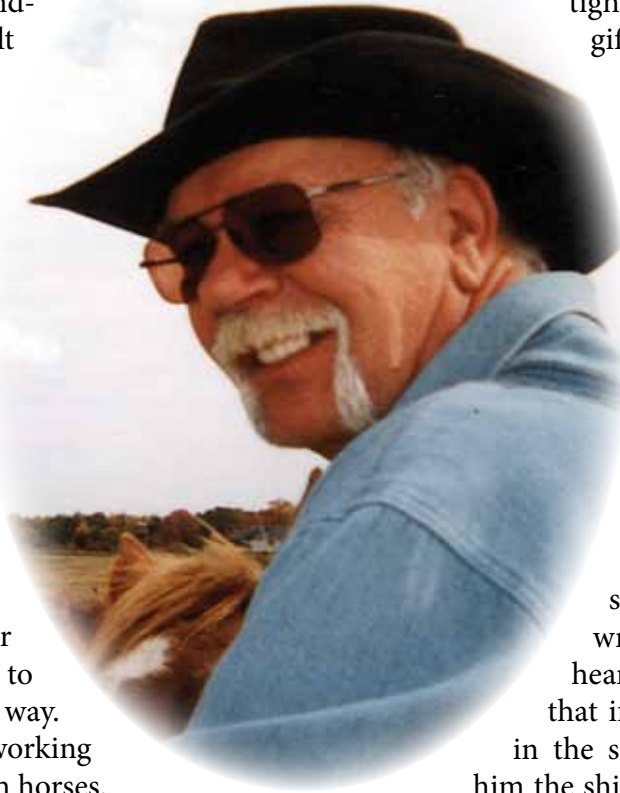
Age: 60

God, who has the First and the Last word in every event, mercifully took Joe home to be with Him after he spent 32 days suffering from extensive injuries received while responding to a call. It is still difficult to find the words that adequately reflect the loss we all feel.

Throughout his entire life, Joe loved being involved in anything that was of service to people. At a young age, he became a police officer and an EMT. He founded the Granville County Horse Rescue and then became a volunteer firefighter for his community here in Oxford. He loved being a firefighter and felt a strong obligation to serve his community in this way. He enjoyed flying, woodworking and, most of all, working with horses.

Joe married Linda Godowsky in 2001, and they celebrated their fifth wedding anniversary in Duke Hospital two days before he passed. Joe has left behind a daughter and three granddaughters in Florida. Here in North Carolina, he has also left behind his wife Linda, their son David, their daughter-in-law Jennifer, his grandson Benjamin, and his brother Fritz. Although he could not speak in the hospital and was suffering a great deal, he was given

the opportunity to love and communicate before he passed away. As his wife Linda fondly reflects, "He held his hand to my cheek and squeezed my hand tightly. What a blessing. What a gift."



Joe and Linda shared the deepest, most special kind of love. He was an awesome man and husband. Almost everything he did in life, he effortlessly put his family and friends first. Linda always used to say that when it came to Joe, you were either going to love him or hate him, because he wore his heart on his sleeve! Whether right or wrong, he always spoke his heart. He was the kind of man that if he were mad at someone, in the same breath he would give him the shirt off his back. If ever there was a need and he had the means, people knew they could rely on him wholeheartedly.

He is missed so very much. He's supposed to be here to tell us how to get through all of this! In the end though, we know that he never gave up, and he fought for every minute of his life. It was just his body that gave out, not his spirit. If Joe could speak to us now, he would say to each of you, "I love you."