



# Joseph Roman Nowakowski

October 21, 1980 - August 1, 2018

Life had a disproportionate propensity to chuck extra lemons at Joseph Roman Nowakowski. But he was quite agile, enough so that he would take extra shots to protect his friends and loved ones. Joe presented a tough appearance -- tattooed, bearded, and muscled. Although, that belied his oversized heart and gentle soul. He would give anything to anyone, and he loved unconditionally.

We often joked that Joe wouldn't do well in a fight. He liked to say he'd kick some butt, but everyone knew that he'd rather hug someone to death and offer a beer before he'd start swinging. Think of his spirit animal as a scruffy, old Labrador.

Unfortunately for Joe, he didn't unconditionally love himself as he did others. His lifelong battle with depression took him on dark journeys, but he always surrounded himself with good people who stood vigilant on the periphery. He didn't trust himself with his own thoughts, and he knew he needed guardians. He had many, even if they didn't know it.

The universe doesn't play nicely within the rules we set up for ourselves, though. And human beings in general further complicate matters simply because we can, constantly testing the foundations of this house of cards we call life. Joe found himself enmeshed in this chaos, often covered in lemon juice.

His struggle was real, but he kept it deep and hidden. He wanted people to see the true Joe, not the internal doppelganger that lurked in the dark and cut him down from the inside.

Joe's immediate surviving family include his son, Bridger; sister, Amanda; brothers Daniel, Peter, and Matthew; and mother Pam. He was preceded in death by his father, Mark, and brother John.

Joe's own armor against life's demons was a wicked sense of humor -- dry, biting, and honed from years of battle. It is with this that he should be remembered, fighting the good

fight and laughing at the onslaught, even if it was only to cauterize the wounds until the next round.

Being born at the genesis of the Reagan years, Joe spent his life waiting for that sweet trickle-down to make its way to where he toiled. Of course, it never came. But he kept plugging along, sneering at the ridiculousness that the 1980s embodied. His early life was intrinsically tied to John Roman Nowakowski, his identical twin brother and best friend. Known simply as “The Twins” -- like some B-horror movie antagonists straight from the decade of their birth -- their misadventures are too numerous to list. The highlights include broken bones, concussions, blood, grit, friendships, happiness and the freedom that comes from being dirt-pirates and feral children in Montana.

His formative years found him in Livingston, where he wended his way through elementary, middle, and high school. Throughout, he picked up some lifelong friends. After leaving that windswept hellscape, he bounced around a few colleges before finding a home at the University of Montana School of Journalism. Following in the footsteps of John and his older brother, Peter, he initially set out to inform the world. The realities of corporate journalism, unfortunately, did not hold to the ideals that set the cornerstone of his education. Boardrooms, stockholders, and their sycophants’ collective inadequacies and abject failure in managing the fourth estate quickly ended Joe’s journalism career. There may have been a touch of bitterness on that topic. (Has it been mentioned that Joe was sarcastic and snarky, as well?)

Fast forward a few years of boring adult stuff and we get to the most significant part of Joe’s life: a tiny clone of him born in 2010, who is everything that was good and sweet about his daddy. Bridger simply makes you feel good. He reminds you of Joe, and will spend his life well loved from a large extended family who will set their differences aside for once and raise this boy with a positive image of his father.

After the reprieve that was Bridger’s birth and keeping with the script, the disorder of the universe continued. That ginormous lemon chucking, grinning, space robot of doom (or whichever supernatural myth floats your boat) went nuclear in 2016. It struck down John, who had a congenital heart defect that finally ran its course. The staggering weight of that blow is beyond words.

So we find ourselves here, now, too many words short. There’s so much more to tell about Joe. Luckily, his friends and family have planned some get-togethers to laugh, to remember, and maybe even poke a little fun (it was so easy) at our friend and loved one.

The first is Thursday, Aug. 9, at Bowser's Lucky Dog Casino in Helena. There you can meet Joe's late, extended VA work family during their regular weekly gathering. Be sure to leave at 4:30 p.m., so you can make the official start of one last "ThursDrinks" with Joe at 4:39 p.m. -- it only takes 9 minutes to get there!

The second memorial takes place at Joe's favorite place to eat, LaPa Grill in Helena. Come by on Saturday, Aug. 11, from 4-6 p.m. for another round of funny Joe stories.

While there's opportunity to mourn, he would want the vibe to be chill and happy, so that's the plan.

Some may be asking, "that's it?" Well, this thing is getting long and expensive, and the twins are back together, screaming from the abyss to cut this short. John is miserly and likes his wallet to be fat, and Joe needs money for some hydraulically actuated, adamantium-infused, adjustable dingle-donk for his mountain bike, or his road bike ... actually ... he'd need it for both. Point being, make sure to come with your best stuff about Joe if you're attending the memorials. And if not, please consider the following:

Joe left behind an amazing little boy. He's going to forge a better path through life, but he doesn't have much of a financial start. There's a Joe Nowakowski memorial account set up at Valley Bank, which will go to a trust being set up for Bridger. That's in lieu of flowers.

And finally, if you're interested in learning about mental health, what you can do to help, and ways to donate go to [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org) or [www.namimt.org](http://www.namimt.org)

# Comments

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“ Joseph always had a smile for everyone, he was an awesome man , willing to help anyone ! He is missed !

**Jackie Zerr** - August 09, 2018 at 11:09 AM

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“ Jackie Zerr lit a candle in memory of Joseph Roman Nowakowski



**Jackie Zerr** - August 09, 2018 at 11:06 AM