

Connie Brown Sledzinski

I don't know where I would be right now if it weren't for Steve and Julie Hensley. Back in 1988, I found myself without a place to live. I was 18 and on my own. Steve and Julie took me under their wing and not only gave me a roof over my head, but love and support and a place to call home. I know in my heart that they gave me the stability and love to make it through college and to where I am today.

I have many wonderful memories of Steve and I will never be able to look at a Cessna or a Piper Cub without seeing him. My first date with my husband was provided by Steve and the Piper Cub. We took off from the grass field at Chuckey. I'll never forget how "cool" this guy thought I was for taking him flying on our first date. Thanks Steve!

I remember living in "Connie's Hut" as it was affectionately known that first summer with the Hensley family in 1988. I lived in the old mustard-brown camper that still held the "cheat sheet" of Spanish words written on the sun visor from Steve's recent trip to Mexico. This way if he was lost in Mexico, he could at least ask for directions. I can't remember, but I'm sure that there must have been some translation of – "where can we find some great food?" Steve always managed to find people who really knew how to cook. I can't imagine that Mexico would have been any exception.

The next year we screened in the back porch and put some bunk beds there so Erin and I could sleep out there. There is nothing like a summer rain at night on the back porch at Steve's house. I can't imagine anything more relaxing and peaceful. It seemed like I was at the airport a lot. I remember delivering parts for Steve's aircraft business on occasion. We were at the airport one day and I remember Steve introducing me to someone as his "oldest daughter." To this day, that is one of the best compliments I have ever received. Steve was the father I always wished I had while growing up.

I remember heading out one afternoon for a date. I came in off the back porch (my bedroom) and Steve was sitting at the kitchen table eating. He made the comment, "you clean up pretty good for someone who sleeps on the back porch." After that date, I remember heading down to the airport to talk with Steve as something just didn't quite feel right. He put me on a motorcycle and we drove around the airport. After we got back to the hanger he said, "What does your gut tell you?" I took that lesson to heart and it has shown me the way on many occasions since. We had many discussions on that back porch about life and why certain people act the way they do. Steve always approached things with common sense. He didn't beat around the bush. He knew exactly where he stood and was not afraid to tell you why.

Some of my favorite memories with Steve include; seeing him dressed as Elvis on Halloween, getting the Hensley Family Christmas Tree, the whole family laying out in the front yard in the rain one hot July after a drought, and the night we started burning brush out in the front yard and Ted thought the house was on fire and ran down the path in his socks.

I'll always remember Steve as my "adoptive" father. Whenever I needed him, he was always there. I learned from Steve that life is too short and if you are miserable, it is time to change things. I learned that you have to work hard for what you want, but remember to have fun while you are working. And, most importantly, friends and family are the most important things in the world. Love is the greatest gift of all.

I sincerely thank Steve & Julie, Ben & Erin for giving me a home through one of the most difficult times of my life. I am truly grateful for the love, support and friendship that I have been given. I love you all deeply.