

# The 'mayor of lower town' is dead at 52

By CRAIG PIECHURA  
Joe was "slow" his family and friends admitted. And God knows he had a lot of friends.

Most people in town knew Joe as the man who smoked a cigar and rode up and down on Main Street on an old Schwinn bike with chrome fenders and a grocery basket.

He used the bike to run errands for friends, buying cigarettes at the Speedway station and lottery tickets at Bill's Market.

He was affectionately dubbed the "Mayor of Lower Town" and he called the Old Village Restaurant on Starkweather his office.

It's just too bad that people like Joe Aceto have to die at the age of 52 before they get "a nice write-up in the local newspaper" because that's just what all his friends at the restaurant wanted him to have.

The last thing Joe did was walk outside beyond the back porch to let his best dog Suzy run. Joe's nephew Tony found him felled by a massive heart attack about 9:30 p.m. Sunday when Tony went down the back steps to see why the mutt kept barking.

THE REGULARS at the restaurant,

like Nellie Parrish, heard unconfirmed rumors about Joe's death Monday morning when he didn't show up for breakfast. Mrs. Parrish tells how that afternoon, the Observer paperboy came in with the Monday paper looking for Joe. He always gave Joe a free paper.

"Yesterday that boy came in, looked all around for Joe and then kept looking at a big jar of money we had on the counter," Mrs. Parrish said. "I told him Joe died the night before, and he asked 'Is that what that's for?' I told him we were taking up a collection and this little boy took a handful of change out of his pocket and dropped it in the jar. We let him sign the card. He was a special friend of Joe's."

Nellie Parrish also was a special friend of Joe's. It was she who taught him how to sign his name on get-well cards that the restaurant sent to the owner's mother-in-law.

Joe told people Nellie was his "girlfriend" because she often would fix a picnic lunch on the lawn and share coffee and peanut butter sandwiches with him.

JOE WAS BORN with a slightly-crippled right leg and a speech defect. He was "slow," so his immigrant parents kept him home from school. His brother Rudy, who lives in Canton, wonders what would have happened if Joe had gotten the early training, teaching and therapy that is available today.

"When he was young—you know how it was back then—my folks didn't know what to do with him."

So, Joe moved into Plymouth with his folks in 1943 and lived at the home on Spring St. from then on.

His mother died in 1976 and his father was buried at Riverside Cemetery one year ago "to the day Joe died."

Dates take on an added significance when there's a death in the family.

Joe's sister, Yolanda Knutson, and her two nephews shared the house with Joe after his folks died. Rudy Aceto figures his brother never would've been happy living with him in his Canton subdivision duplex. The nearest store is a half-mile away down a busy street, and doesn't even have a place to sit down and order breakfast.

No, his brother said, Joe needed a Main Street small town. Plymouth had corners where he could hold court and conduct friendly business. Places where the cops knew him and looked after him if anyone mean started to taunt him or throw stones.

THERE WERE people who considered Joe a public nuisance, a bluish on the town. Many people grew uncomfortable when Joe approached them and asked them how they were feeling.



Joe posed for a snapshot recently with his dog Suzy, who misses Joe as much as his friends at the Old Village restaurant.

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