

## Ode to Sir Richard



Richard Laurence Baron  
1945-2011

*Note: Richard Laurence Baron, a Houston writer and “ad guy” since the early eighties, died of congestive heart failure December 29, 2011. I learned of his sudden and untimely passing by way of a phone call the next morning from a mutual friend and one-time co-worker of Richard’s, Mary Jo Martin. Amidst reflection and sadness, and admittedly a few chuckles, these recollections are offered in tribute to a wonderful friend who just happened to be a damned good writer.*

This is not easy. It’s not particularly fun, either. Damn you, Richard! Standing there, imposing figure that you are. Martini in hand, cigar delicately balanced between fingers as you gaze down upon me from afar with an ever-so-slight smirk.

*“It ain’t easy, is it?”* you mumble, which for you is a rarity.

Writing about other writers is difficult enough. Writing about one who’s a friend and who I feel is still here but isn’t, is tough.

*Relax, Richard. And listen for once. Take another sip of your “Thursday Night Special” martini and reflect on these musings from your friend.*

“Sir Richard” – that’s the nickname I bestowed upon him. Richard Laurence Baron – his three-part name sounded to me more like a title than a name. The only thing missing was the comma after “Laurence.” *Richard Laurence, BARON.* It bespeaks royalty. I just thought “Sir Richard” fit. I still do.

I think the first time I met Sir Richard was at an evening dinner meeting of the Business Marketing Association (BMA) here in Houston. We were both standing over by the bar (naturally), Richard with his glass of red wine already in hand. A very gracious fellow, I thought at the time, if only because he greeted me with a firm handshake and a resounding baritone of “Hello, Joe (thanks to my name tag). I’m Richard Laurence Baron. So good of you to join us this evening.”

Impressive, I thought. This guy not only has one name, he has three. And he remembers them all!

Oh, and did I mention he was tall, significantly tall. Very personable, too. We chatted some after he introduced me to his colleague and then, respectfully, excused himself to go mingle.

*OK, Richard, take a puff on that cigar you're ever-so-gently twirling, and then another sip of your martini. I can sense you're wincing a bit. But, hey, dammit, this is my story. Chill!*

When it wasn't wine or martinis (or craft beer), it was coffee. Sir Richard and I would meet at La Madeleine in Town & Country and have breakfast. And talk. Politics, advertising, food, restaurants, and, yes, even work. During some of these visits, we'd plot how we were going to get a joint venture off the ground.

Richard hadn't been on his own very long when we first started these visits, so he was still getting his feet wet at this entrepreneurial thing. Over the course of several months, Sir Richard and I would meet every few weeks to try and further develop our marketing joint venture; that's until we got to a point when we discovered there wasn't a simple way to explain to prospective clients why they should hire us to perform these services. It involved risk. I don't even remember what we called the damned thing. We eventually abandoned the idea, both agreeing that we were just ahead of our time.

Unfortunately, Sir Richard and I never got a chance to work much together. One time, though, he called me to get my take on a radio or TV spot he'd written. He told me I had more experience in this media and he wanted my opinion. I felt honored.

Once I read it, I called him and said that it had the makings of a good spot, but that I hadn't realized it would be a sixty second version. Richard, taken aback a bit, said it was only a "30." I said, "Richard, you've got too many words in here for a 30. You're gonna have to cut some."

Well, Sir Richard doesn't like to cut, especially when they're *his* words! He proceeded to explain to me his strategy and rationale for the word count, just as if he were justifying to an editor about a print piece. When I explained that precise word count doesn't really matter that much in broadcast, I honestly think he was perplexed.

I advised him how he should rewrite for the "pace" of the spot and not worry about all the specifics he'd included. Being the professional he was, Sir Richard was very appreciative and thanked me. I didn't have the heart to send him a bill; I just told him he'd buy the next round of drinks.

*Enjoying your martini and cigar, Richard? Hmmmmm, I notice the slight smirk is gone. Could it be a slight smile emerging?*

Rarely, have I experienced Sir Richard showcasing brevity. And being speechless? Forget it! However, I recall one phone conversation that proved just that.

Richard called me for something (may have been just checking in) and, as usual, we chatted about a bunch of stuff. He was particularly joyful about a recent meeting or assignment he had with a local company and proceeded to tell me all about it. Seems he was especially enamored with his client contact, and went on and on about how nice she was and how delightful he thought her daughters were, and blah, blah, blah.

Finally, he asked me if I knew of the company or this woman. I told him I had heard of them. Richard asked me "Well, if I may ask, Joe, do you know her well?" I said, "Pretty well, Richard. I guess I've known her and her family for several years now."

"Several years?" he said. "Well, you could probably be a wealth of information for me about her, if you don't mind, of course." I said, "Richard, I don't mind at all, but I must tell you, I'm slightly biased in my opinion of her, and it could impact your business relationship with her."

Sir Richard then reassured, "That's alright, Joe. I'll respect your friendship with her."

I replied simply, "Uh, Richard, she's not exactly my friend. She's my sister-in-law."

Silence.

*More silence.*

"Your sister-in-law?" quietly intoned Richard.

"Yes," I said, "my sister-in-law."

Silence.

*Long pause.*

Then, in that big, bellowing voice came ***"You're shittin' me?!!!!!!"***

I damn near dropped the phone. "No, Richard, I'm not," I said as calmly as I could muster.

*More silence.*

Shorter pause.

Finally, Richard calmly states, "Your sister-in-law, huh? God, it's a good thing I didn't say anything bad about her!"

That was Richard Laurence Baron. A fellow writer and creative. The ride was way too short.

Paraphrasing a line from Star Trek, "He was, is and always shall be my friend." Martini glasses raised and with a sincere wink, *Cheers, Sir Richard!*