



“Losing a friend like Wake in your mid-20s, when you feel invincible, makes you appreciate people, and the fragile nature of life.”

**SETH JONES**, *Editor-in-Chief*

# No better backpack

**E**very time I follow a man onto an airplane, I have backpack envy. ¶ It seems all the new backpacks have a place dedicated for a water bottle, a few extra pockets and maybe even a straw peeking out. My backpack has all of three pockets, a hole in the bottom of it and a corner where a pen once exploded, turning everything crossing that territory blue. ¶ But I'll never abandon my backpack. Because it has one feature all others lack: a reminder of a friend.

John Wake was the student programs manager at GCSAA back in the late 1990s and early 2000s. We were co-workers, but more importantly, we were friends. The calendar tells me now that it was 10 years ago that he passed away somewhat unexpectedly from complications of sickle cell anemia. The backpack, which Wake once left behind in my car after we got back from the Indy 500, tells me it really wasn't that long ago.

Wake's backpack has now been with me to seven different countries, nine Golf Industry Shows, and to who

knows how many of golf's majors, including the year it had a brand new golf shirt stolen out of it while it was momentarily left alone in the media center. (Somewhere out there, there's an out-of-work golf journalist and he's wondering where his career went awry. Answer: the day you committed a crime against your fellow golf writer and stole something out of John Wake's backpack!)

Last week, backpack in tow, I drove from a business

meeting in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, to Chicago to visit my old college roommate. Will moved to Thailand not long after we graduated, and currently he's a journalist working in Cambodia. It's safe to say that I don't get to see him often. Will was the best man at my wedding, yet it had been almost four years since I last saw him.

I spent all of one evening in Chicago with Will, laughing and trading stories from when we were younger and dumber. We definitely told a few Wake stories, includ-

ing our all-time favorite: the night we all spent together in a Chicago jail. For that story, catch me over a beer and just say, "Wrigley Field."

Will thanked me for making the long drive to see him. I've got two young kids and a busy life, and he appreciated the effort it took. I told him right then that I'd always make an effort, for the rest of our lives, if he just gives me a little head's up. Losing a friend like Wake in your 20s, when you feel invincible, makes you appreciate people, and the fragile nature of life.

Yesterday I walked into a power meeting filled with key players in my life: the owner of this magazine, along with my publisher, as well as a group of our key advertisers. I flew in and out of the same city on the same day specifically for this meeting. I was the last one to arrive. As I approached the door, I caught my own reflection in the window: sports coat and slacks, fresh haircut, the picture of professionalism.

And then I spotted the beat-up backpack. It looked out of place, maybe even unprofessional.

But I can't trade it in. Wherever I go, I feel like my friend Wake is there with me in spirit, partly because of his old backpack.

It's lasted me 10 years. I think with a little duct tape it'll last 10 more. And I hope you'll forgive me if I arrive at a meeting with you with this dusty old bag over my shoulder.

Email Jones at:  
[sjones@northcoastmedia.net](mailto:sjones@northcoastmedia.net)