

Eulogy for My Dad

One thing I inherited from my Dad was long windedness. I hope you're not hungry.

I also want to thank all of you for coming this morning. Dad means a lot to all of us. It is very difficult to put into words all that he means to us. And I ask for your patience if I occasionally need to express some emotion. I remember in 4th grade - we were supposed to tell the class who our heroes were. Others boys got up and talked about Norm Cash and Al Kaline and Rocky Colovito from the Tigers and Hopalong Cassidy, Night train Lane and Yale Larry from the Lions. I got up and started to tell about my Dad – He was my hero - going through the great depression; picking cherries up North with his family to support themselves – And then I just started crying and couldn't finish. All of your friends are out there and it's not cool to start crying. Not sure at 4th grade that I had a lot more to say – so it was a good excuse to stop. Now after 50 more years I have more to say. So I hope I am able to finish this today to honor and celebrate my Dad.

Short Wave – W8BVA – Light bulb

Some of my earliest recollections of my Dad revolve around his interest in Short Wave / Amateur radio. How many of you are Short Wave operators? Just a few of you? One of the first things Dad did after we moved into our current house in 1955 was to string his antenna across the yard. It was pretty ugly. Then came the big day when he put up his 40 ft tower. Our home movies have some great shots of him putting up that tower. Wearing a trench coat – smoking a cigarette as he worked. I remember him sitting for hours in the basement: “CQ CQ CQ W8BVA calling CQ” looking for someone around the world to connect to. Amateur Radio was the original Instant Messenger and Facebook. It was the way people connected around the world. It took me years before I realized that CQ was short for “Seek You.” I remember that he would take me downstairs and sit me on his lap as he contacted Australia and Hawaii. It was exotic and exciting.

He was always so interested in the RF power that his rig generated. RF are those invisible radio waves that carry TV and cell phones and shortwave over the air. Dad always had an air of excitement when his rig fired up, the tubes warmed up and the RF indicator would show full power. One day he wanted to demonstrate how much power his rig generated “Bobby you gotta see this.” – he took a light bulb and connected one coil of wire to it and brought it near his transmitter. It started to glow. The closer it got to the transmitter the brighter it got. “That's real power.” For me that was amazing His passion for electronics sparked (no pun intended) my early interest in science and electronics. Thanks Dad. You did that for me.

Work – Soldering Gun

His work was very important. My earliest recollection of his work was this soldering gun. My sister Pat said she had never even seen a soldiering gun. Now this is a soldering gun. To me, as a young boy in the

50's, it looked like a ray gun. He would pull the trigger and a light would shoot out of it and the big transformer would hum. This was cool. How many kids dads played with ray guns at work? Mine did.

Occasionally he would take me down to his shop on Saturdays. I didn't work with him – but just being in that environment with him worked its magic on me. At first I wondered if I was going to get electrocuted. Any here remember his shop behind Dahl's Dimestore? But I saw Dad working with all this electronics and gradually my fear of electricity went away. But he wanted me to respect it. One day he wanted me to see something. "Bobby I want you to see this." Because he wanted me to respect electricity. A TV set had been sitting on his shelf for over a month. He took an old screw driver and shorted it across the high voltage capacitor. A giant spark jumped with a loud bang. I jumped back. The screw driver melted. He would always tell me – "Don't try this at home. Don't fear it – but respect its power." Many years later I was reminded of this when a realtor walked into our electronics engineering office and said "Why do I always think I'm going to get electrocuted here?" And I remembered my Dad and his shop.

As I spent some time with him a month ago we were talking about dying. He told me that he was ready. The first thing he said was that he was proud of his work. He did good work. He had always given good value to his customers. As he lay dying, I told him how I often I think about him when I deal with my customers. Thanks Dad. You did that for me.

Cubs – Cubs Hat

We can't talk about Dad without talking about the Cubs. There are some things that you get from your parents – whether by nurture or nature – that you are not happy about. I am not sure if passing on his love for the Cubs to me was a blessing or curse. 63 years without being in the World Series. 100 years without a World Series victory. Dad lived and died for the Cubs. I have vivid memories of the first game he took me to when I was 6 or 7. I even remember the score. We went to many games together as a family over the years – always waiting for next year. But as I reflect on it – being a Cub fan builds in you a certain tenacity that helps you face adversity – adversity that seems endless. I am sure that being a Cub fan for over 70 years helped my Dad face the cancer that he did with the dignity and strength that he exhibited – that I saw – that all of us saw. And I am sure that my 50 years of Cubs Catastrophe's have helped make me a stronger person. Thanks Dad. For passing that love on to me as well.

Garden – Beans

I found this bean down on my Dad's workbench. Most of you know that my Dad was an avid gardener. I remember when he first cut out a small plot of land at our house for his garden. Each year it got bigger. I remember using some early math skills and estimating that his garden would cover all of Grand Haven in 50 years at the rate he was going. He planted corn, beans, tomatoes, and pickles for over 50 years on the same soil. Some may remember my Dad's great experiment - cooking the top soil in big pots over the grill to try to eliminate the mildew. Of course Mom wouldn't let him bake it in the oven. This is one of those things – when you are twelve years old and the kids in the neighborhood come over and say "What's your Dad cooking on the grill?" and you say "Oh just some dirt from his garden." That was my

Dad and we loved him for it. It was classic Dad – doing things that sometimes embarrassed us – and sometimes worked.

When I moved into my first home with land, that first summer I planted beans and corn. Dad's love of fresh vegetables and gardening had rubbed off. Thanks Dad for passing that love on to me.

This bean represents life as I know it. Our lives here on earth are like this seed. When we die, it is like the seed planted in the ground. These ashes are like that bean. Today we are burying those ashes it's a lot like planting a dead seed in the ground. It looks dead – but spring will bring a totally new and different life. That is what we look forward to today as we remember my Dad.

Family

What I remember above all else about my Dad was his love for his family. He cared for us. He provided for us. The last sentence I heard him say was "I love you" to one of my sisters. Growing up I never realized what it meant for one who is self employed to take a vacation. There were no paid vacations or paid holidays. But he always took the time to be with us. Dad thank you for planting those memories that will live our whole lives – for taking that time to be with us.

Faith

Finally I want to say something about his faith. I know this is important to a lot of you. Many of you know that Dad didn't believe in God or heaven. He thought that it was lights out when he died. And you couldn't talk to him about it. I happen to believe in God and also that not all go to heaven. Two months ago as I was praying for my Dad, I felt that God was telling me that God was going to carry my Dad through this time – carry him to heaven and that I didn't need to worry. That was certainly what I wanted but knowing that often we can confuse God's voice for our desires – I just wasn't sure that it was God speaking to me. Then one day as I was struggling with this, I felt that God nudged me to just open the window. As I did that, the sounds of seldom heard church bells rang out the following phrase from a well known hymn:

For all the saint s– who from their labors rest

From that point on I had no doubts that my Dad was going to heaven – that he was going to be a saint who rested from his labors. I remember in those last days my Mom saying to him "Dad put down that screw driver. Your work is done." I went down to his workbench last night because I wanted to solder the coil to the light bulb and found that he was out of solder. If you are a TV repairman and you are out of solder, your work is done. And so my Dad is done working.

So, I had no doubts that my Dad was going to heaven – whether he liked it or not.

And in the last week of his life his words to me changed from:

“Where am I going?” – I told him – “Dad, you’re going home” “What is Home?” “Home is what you and Mom made for us kids. God is making a home for you.” “I don’t want to hear that crap.” Some of you know him well.

Two days later he said:

“Let’s go.” “Where are we going Dad?” “Home, I guess”

Just a few days later he said to me:

“I’m going home”

So I have seen, in just the last few weeks, movement from rejection to tentative acceptance to assurance. So – Dad – we all look forward to seeing you again and greeting you and hearing how weird it is up there and telling us your stories. [Just before my eulogy, my brother-in-law Steve told a story about how my Dad greeted him at my sister’s wedding in Boulder Colorado. “Welcome Steve. Boy is it weird here – but do I have some stories for you.”] You are up there. You have led the way for your family here on earth and now you go before us into heaven. We love you Dad.