

My Tribute to Dad  
Memorial Service 04/23/09

I was watching the series finale of ER a few weeks ago, and they showed clips of memorable scenes throughout the years. One scene made a timely impression on me. It was the scene with Dr. Mark Green. It was his last words to his wife before his death. He said to her, "Be generous. Be generous with your time, with your love, with your life." That single statement summarized my Dad's life in that one moment for me.

My Dad was an incredibly generous man. He was always willing to help others, believed that all things were possible, and taught others to believe in themselves again when they thought all hope was lost. People deserved second chances.

There have been many holidays that we would have people join us at our table, people between homes, needing a place to stay, alone for the holidays because their spouses or families were visiting relatives, and so on. Mom and Dad welcomed people into their home, their hearts, and their lives. It was their nature...it was just who they were.

Dad believed each person could make a difference. He was a true patriot and believed America was the finest country in the world. As a civilian he believed that it was his duty to be informed about the local as well as state politics and it was essential to vote. "One vote CAN make a difference," he would tell us.

As a soldier, he served his country proudly with 2 tours in Vietnam. He came home with a lot of baggage, later classified as post-traumatic stress disorder. Like so many soldiers, he saw and experienced things that one just should not have to go through. It took time for him to sort through those thoughts, feelings, and nightmares, but I think he eventually found a place for them. He learned to live in the present and not re-live the past. And with that, he was a better husband and father.

Mom & Dad met in the cafeteria of Methodist Hospital. At that time, Mom was rooming with another girl named Judy. She'll swear to this day that Dad called to take her roommate Judy out and not her. But Dad would always say, "That's not true. It was never true. It was AND always has been YOU." I tend to side with Dad on this one. I think my Dad was smitten

with Mom the first time he saw her. My Dad adored my mother. You could tell by the way her looked at her. Even after 43 years of marriage, I would catch him gazing at her like men do in their 20's. He truly loved her and he did everything he knew how to do to show it. He was one of those extremely rare men who never forgot a birthday, anniversary, mother's day, or really any other holiday. He always brought home sappy sentimental cards and flowers. Dad was a card guy – he would spend an hour reading every card down the aisles at Hallmark. Words were important to him, and selecting just the right card for the moment was important to him.

Although he did a great job at selecting cards and flowers, he was a prankster at heart. His gift selections were sometimes “lacking.” It wasn't that the gift was lacking, it was more of a time and place issue. He was notorious for taking Mom out for her birthday with a group of friends or family, handing her a beautifully wrapped box, for her to unwrap in front of everyone of course, only for her to snap the lid shut to conceal the lingerie inside. Dad loved to embarrass her and yet in his own way remind her that she was the most beautiful woman in the world to him.

But when it came to embarrassing people, Dad in his early days was the best. He definitely had a public side and a private side. When he was younger, his public side was often brash, opinionated, and boisterous. Mom would describe Dad like “a bull in a china shop.” He could not get from Point A to Point Z without being recognized in some fashion – he would trip, run into something, break something, talk so loud everyone around him could hear what he was saying, etc...That was Dad. He often times said things in such a manor as if he had no “filtering” devise between his mouth and his brain. We would silently shake our heads and think “I cannot believe he just said that! What was he thinking?”

Dad was a phenomenal businessman, genius, and dreamer. His mind never stopped creating – new ideas, new projects, new inventions. Of course HE dreamt them, SOMEONE ELSE would have the task of implementing them. His creativity never stopped.

But privately, Dad was a different man. Very few people got to see this side of him...not until later in his life. With Kevin and I, Dad was soft, gentle, & kind. He was “Daddy.”

With that, I'd like to share a personal letter I wrote for Dad before he passed away. I wrote it after we had found out that the cancer had spread and further treatment was no longer an option. Through this letter, which I was able to read to him early after this final diagnosis, I was able to say what I had to say. Time afforded me this luxury, this closure, and a way to say good-bye.

So here it goes....

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Dear Daddy,

As your time draws to a close, I wanted to take a moment to thank you for all of the lessons you taught me & the memories you gave me. And because of you, I've grown up loving who I am and appreciating myself because of (and often times inspite of my differences) – I am like you in so many ways. I am proud of who I am, and wouldn't want to be any other way. I am comfortable in my own skin, and I thank you for that.

So many people know you as a business man, church member, fellow Realtor, or even a friend. Only Kevin and I grew up knowing you as "Daddy." What a Dad you made! Kevin and I grew up believing you could do anything – you were our hero...our super hero...only without the cape & mask.

You looked at life through our eyes growing up – enjoying every smell, every taste, every experience as if it was a "first" for you too. It was like you experienced the joy and exhilaration of that new toy or that first bike ride. You were a big kid and the best Dad a kid could ever ask for. Although, I know that in itself drove Mom nuts! She thought that she had two kids, but never quite planned she'd end up with THREE! – you were the biggest kid of all. You relished in playing with us, teaching us, and being a Dad to us. Out of all of the rolls you played throughout your life, being a Dad was your best accomplishment. You always had enough love to give – there was never a shortage of that...that well never ran dry. We were your pride and joy – and we knew it!

You were the guru of “creating moments” for us. You realized that life is full of snap-shot memories, and some of my best one’s didn’t cost us a dime. They were the moments we spent together, doing some of the most simplest things, and making a moment that would last a lifetime.

Thank you for allowing me to be “Daddy’s Little Girl” all these years. I have always felt special because of you. I am proof of there being a special bond between a father and daughter. I always felt like a princess in your eyes. I remember you saying that all little girls are princesses, and that they should have tall princess beds like you read about in fairy-tales. On Christmas Eve when I was five, I fell asleep in Kevin’s room as we waited for Santa Clause to arrive. The next morning I awoke in the most magnificent bed I could have ever imagined. It was a tall 4-post bed with a white lace canopy with little yellow & green flowers on it. My entire bedroom had been converted and I remember that I thought it was all a dream. I know that you were the inspiration for that, and I will always be your little princess.

I remember when I was in middle school, Mom had my hair cut in the Dorothy Hamill style. I cried for days, but it was the “in cut” and she thought I looked adorable. It wasn’t until that summer when I auditioned for a part in a kids play in the park that broke my heart. I got the role of the side-kick cowboy, a BOY’S part, in the play. I was crushed! I looked enough like a boy that I got the 2<sup>nd</sup> lead roll in the summer play. You and Mom explained to me I was the only kid who could read and memorize the character’s lines who quoted gibberish from Geoffrey Chaucer. That made it a little better, but I didn’t want to be or look like a boy. On the day of the play, I remembered all of my lines and performed confidently as the side-kick cowboy. You brought me flowers after my little performance that day – red roses - and told me that I was beautiful and no matter how they dressed me, it was unmistakable that I was a beautiful little girl and that you were so proud of me. What a day!

Thank you for teaching both Kevin and I to have a love of animals. This undeniably came from you – it could not have come from Mom. I remember the day that you allowed us to bring Tom home. YOU knew Mom didn’t like cats. WE knew Mom didn’t like cats. But Kevin and I visited the new litter of kittens every day, and had a name for all them. You walked down with us that day, for us to show you our favorite one “Tom” only to walk back with a grey kitten in a shoe box. You allowed me to keep him in my

room, under my bed, and it would be a secret that the 3 of us would share. I don't know how many days it took until Mom found out, but I can only imagine the trouble YOU were in. BIG TROUBLE since Mom was terrified of cats above all other animals. I can only imagine the conversation going something like, "But Judy, look at them. Look how happy it makes them. We can't take it away from them now...." Somehow, whatever you said worked, because Tom was ours. Of course, we named Tom after the grey cartoon cat in "Tom & Jerry" so it was only a matter of time until we got Tom a companion. We soon discovered that Mom hated an animal worse than cats – mice...or a gerbil as Jerry came to be.

Although both you and Mom grew up in racial households of the 1950's, we thank both of you for making a conscious effort not to pass on that discrimination to your children. Kevin and I grew up believing that all people were equal and were to be treated as such. We considered Eloise, our housekeeper and her children part of our family, even though they were black. We loved Eloise like she were our own...and she loved us back. Children know real love, and you never discouraged us from having friends of different color or creed or socio-economic backgrounds. You taught us that people are just people regardless of the package that God puts them in.

I remember one Sunday when we were in elementary school, Kevin and I had come home from church and had come to the conclusion that Jesus was black. Yep, Jesus wasn't some white guy on the cross, but he must have been black or at least really dark skinned. Whoever had designed the guy on the cross that hung in church had it all wrong. It all started because we had learned in Sunday school where Mesopotamia was that day. From there, over Sunday lunch Kevin and I talked about it's location, the people in Africa, Egypt, and the Middle East, and had come to the conclusion that Jesus must have been black. Daddy, you listened as this conversation unfolded, as your children took pieces of information and had drawn their own conclusions. I think you were proud that we had deduced this on our own. But then you told us a story that some churches in California have crosses where Jesus is tanned with blonder hair, and in other parts of the country, Jesus may be darker or look slightly different than the one that hangs in our church. You asked us, "Why do you think that would be?" I don't think we had an answer, but I remember what you told us. You said that perhaps the image of Jesus looks slightly different depending on the areas of the country and perhaps the image takes on the people of a church's congregation. People tend to connect better with people that look "like"

them, but it wasn't about what Jesus looked like, but it was the message that he taught. If allowing the image in church makes people connect to Jesus easier, then they are more apt to hear and understand Jesus' message. It wasn't about the man, it was about the message and the lessons that he taught. Again, you had summed it all up for us and it made perfect sense.

All my life I wanted to grow up and be like you. In 7<sup>th</sup> grade we had to fill out a career-evaluation form of our interests. It was to tell us what we might me when we grow up. I remember filling out that math was one of my favorite subjects – I wanted to be good at math because you were good at math. I remember Mom asking me about it, and I remember telling her that “Daddy says that I can do anything I set my mind to, and I WANT to be good at math.” I then remember you saying that I couldn't be good at everything that you were – that I was going to be my own person. I was good at other things that you weren't. It was crushing that I couldn't be you, but I could only be “like” you. But in the same sense it was liberating...I was going to be me.

In high school, you had 3 rules for me to follow:

1. Never to lie to you
2. Always let you know where I am,
3. And my favorite, Never do anything that I would be ashamed of doing if you were in the room with me.

The last one made the biggest impression on me. It guided me to do or not do a lot of things because I did not want you to be disappointed in me. I could not bear the thought of you being disappointed in me. I shined like the sun when you were proud of me, and I always wanted you to be proud of me.

When I went off to college, I think you might have missed me as much as I missed you. I don't know who set the guideline, but I was not to return home until Thanksgiving break. It was a long time until Thanksgiving, but you wrote me often and I so looked forward to your letters. You sent me grass clippings one time in an envelope and told me that you were thinking of me, your little girl who was attending Lawn Mower College, a play on words for Lon Morris College. The time away was good and allowed my independence to grow and flourish. I grew out of my shell and spread my wings. Started to become the person I was supposed to be.

Ever since I was young, you told me that you would always expect more from me. You told me that I would go to college – there was never any question – and I would get a degree and have a career. You explained that life was not fair, that in your lifetime that this was a “man’s world.” Life was not fair for women – it was just the way it was. Kevin would have it easier than me simply because he was a man. Women could do the same work as a man, and they would not get the same pay. You said that you hoped that things would change during my lifetime, but you had to prepare me if things didn’t. I would go to college. I would get a degree. And I would always be able to support myself, so that I would never have to rely on a man to support me. I could chose to marry or not marry, but I would never have to be strapped to a man, trapped in a marriage, because I could not support myself. Thank you for setting your standards early on, because I am an independent, self-reliant woman who believes she can do anything she sets her mind to. You set this foundation for me, and I thank you more than words can ever say.

Daddy, out of all of my accomplishments, I must share with you that the proudest moment I have ever felt, thus far, was when I graduated college with my BA in English. I have never felt prouder of myself, more confident in myself, and more alive than at that moment. Walking across the stage at graduation was nothing short of breath-taking for me. Thank you. Thank you for setting that path for me. Thank you for allowing me to spread my wings and sore higher than I thought was possible for myself.

I know that that must have been hard for you – when I went away to college you became an observer in my life instead of a participant. Looking back now, it must have been hard for you and Mom. But from the depths of my soul, thank you for giving me wings so that I can fly, and the courage to leave the nest and soar.

I truly love who I am because of you. I don’t worry about conforming, and find grace and beauty in “dancing to a beat of a different drummer.” You taught me to accept that I am not you, but am beautiful as ME. I try to treat people with dignity and respect. And follow Mom’s (and Thumper’s) advice, of “if you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all.”

Daddy, when all is said and done, Kevin and I are only part of your legacy. Although, secretly I hope that we are your best part.

I promise that I will think of you every day. And I will think of you and smile each time I see children splashing water in the street after a hard rain. I will think of you when I eat raw sugar cookie dough. When I ride the Boliver Ferry to watch the dolphins ride the surf. When I stay up late to watch the old black & white movies like “Days of Wine & Roses” or “Rebecca.” When I hear Nat King Cole or Louis Armstrong on the radio. And best of all, when the holidays roll around and we serve a sliver of pie beneath a mount of Cool Whip. Yes, we will all smile and think of you. And in those moments, I know that you’ll be with me. My Daddy and your princess.

When I was little, I never thought of you not being here with me. I truly thought that we would grow old together – old people in rocking chairs, although in my mind you would always be older. I never thought about you not being here with me, laughing, guiding, advising, and telling all your stories. But as things would have it, your time is ending well before mine. Really unfair, and certainly not part of MY plan. So I guess I am going to have to resolve myself and find solace in that when my time comes, we’ll reunite in the hereafter, and I’ll have to fill you in on the rest of my life – although you’ve promised to check in on me from time to time. I promise to share it all with you then, Daddy, the stories and adventures alike. But know that no matter where my life takes me from here, I love you and you will forever be a part of me.

All My Love,  
Elisa