

I find myself not knowing what to say, at a loss for words. A first. What do you say at an event that was always anticipated but never actually expected?

- We'll miss you? Too self serving
- Goodbye? Suggests we're done learning what Dad had to teach.
- Thank you? Seems too simple.

At his core dad was a builder: an engineer who built technologies, an entrepreneur who built businesses, a husband and a father who built this eclectic collection of family and friends.

For me dad was a sounding board and a moral compass, which helped me build myself. I don't remember when we first met, I was pretty young at the time, but some of my best memories involved him.

- Even if handball at the elementary school wasn't his idea of a great afternoon...it became mine.
- I learned to build electronic circuits in elementary school, though I never quite got over his making me wire wrap instead of telling me about soldering irons.
- Our annual camping trip at Lake George couldn't have been his idea of fun. No air conditioning, no pastrami, and lots of water. Whether raining from above for 2 weeks straight (starting the moment that our massive tent needed assembly), losing his eyeglasses over the side of a boat, or just living on an island when he hated to swim...there was always water. He put up with it for his family.
- Dad really adored mom, as much as she loved him, and he supported her in everything. When mom went back to get her doctorate, and needed quiet time to work on her thesis, dad spent a full year taking the kids out every Saturday to keep us out of her way.
- Mom & dad had their own special relationship. As kids mom often told us that their song was "Mac the knife". A bit bizarre, but dad heard it on the radio when they were dating and announced it was theirs. For years we gave them recordings on special occasions, and paid special note whenever we heard it played. Decades later, dad asked why we liked the song so much. Mom reminded him of the history, only to be told it was a joke. He picked a song about murder as the least appropriate choice possible. Mom's response was that she made it her own.
- Mom, dad, and we kids traveled a lot, mostly by plane. We learned in Mexico that there was such a thing as soup too salty to eat. We learned at home that the best place to see Christmas lights and 4th of July fireworks was from the air, sitting in the back of dad's Cessna. When weather grounded his flying, we learned that the game room at the holiday inn outside of Charleston was really cool. Mom & dad kept traveling, to France, China, down riverboats in Europe, and a personal journey to trace roots in Russia.

- Dad taught us math on long car rides, and I still remember learning integral calculus without ever being told that's what it was. He taught us to count and add in hexadecimal in the car.
- Speaking of cars, we learned about estimation and precision in his cars. Dad wouldn't fill a gas tank until it needed gas, which at least once meant running out of fuel and stalling as we turned into a gas station. Brilliantly, his car coasted to the pump. Another time, as dad drove inches from a brick wall at 80 miles an hour, I suggested that he might need a bit more space. Dad responded by asking what size gap we needed if he wasn't going to hit it anyway.
- His car was also an instrument of torture, the best example of which was a 10 day car trip across New York State. Even the partridge family had a large bus, but we were trapped in a decidedly smaller can for 10 days with one 8 track tape. To this day I reach for earplugs if I hear "that happy feeling", followed by "Brandy".
- Other forms of travel were much more fun. Don't tell mom, but dad's forklift rides at autonumerics, full speed from the top of the lift, were amazing.
- Dad's biggest frustration came when he needed to solve a problem and he encountered the ultimate immovable force in the universe...a non-thinking person reciting rules or policies. He would invariably ask this person, often a store clerk or call center customer service rep, if he could please speak to a grown-up instead.
- Dad was a great negotiator when he found a grown-up. I'd heard that he once needed a part for a charcoal grill from sears. They informed him that they didn't sell the part. He pointed to a grill and said..."yes you do, it just has all of those extra bits around it. If I pay for a grill, don't I get the part? Now, since we've established that you do sell what I need, my question is whether it's reasonable for you to charge me for an entire grill when I only need this little piece?" They took the part off a floor model and sent him home with it.
- Sending dad to a store was always exciting, a bit like betting on a horse race. He was an impulse buyer who bought things because they were interesting. You might win big or lose big, but you never knew the outcome until the end. He'd go to the mall for some minor item and return home with air conditioners for each of the kids. A trip to get milk resulted in our first taste of kiwi; which at the time was a bizarre looking fruit that none of us knew how to eat (do you eat the brown fuzzy outside or just the fluorescent green inside?). Another milk run resulted in him bringing home a cheese so smelly it literally cleared us out of the house.

One thing these all had in common...they were learning experiences. A lesson might have been intended, or it might simply have been present because of how he did things. But it was there.

Dad might not have noticed just how much of our lives were patterned on his lessons. Put your tools away. Family comes first. Accept big challenges, but work as hard as you must to keep your commitments. I'm cold, put on a sweater...oh wait, that one is mom,

And now our pattern is gone. As challenges go, this is a big one.

There are universal constants. The sun rises in the east. We breathe oxygen. Mom and dad are always there. One of those constants has just changed and nothing else looks the same. His biggest lesson, taught by actions instead of words, was to always leave things, leave the world, better than we found it. Dad cleared that goal by a mile. We should all do half as well.

It's been said that each of us has our own aura, a tiny glimmer of light. In a country with hundreds of millions of people, should one of those lights suddenly go out, the effect wouldn't be noticeable. Maybe so, but who here doesn't think the world seems just a bit darker today?

From all of us, thanks, Dad. Thanks for everything. Thanks for pushing and challenging. Thanks for the DNA. I'd thank you for my singing voice, and sense of humor, but those who live with me might disagree. Mostly, thanks for the lessons. I started by saying you were a builder. That was only partly right. You were also a teacher.

Goodbye dad, but mostly thanks.