

Carol

I came to know my father later, rather than sooner in our lives. During my childhood, he was a godlike figure that spent what is known today as quality time with me, whenever he had some - which wasn't often. My world seemed pretty normal until the day I took a piece of wax paper and a tongue depressor to school for show and tell and explained about my dad collecting stool specimens and, yeah, blood too! It was then I learned that his life - and by extension, our family's life - was not in the least bit ordinary.

My father taught me many things as a child that I was amazed to find out none of my friends at school knew. I knew about cat scratch fever and psittacosis (translation: no pets). I knew about lethal foods like uncooked pork, rare hamburger and, God forbid, raw shellfish, which were nothing more than gustatory Russian Roulette. I knew about antibodies and red top tubes and perhaps the most important guideline of all - that a normal portion of ice cream was a quart, preferably cherry vanilla, and usually eaten straight from the carton with a big spoon.

Life with my father was a continuous education - for both of us. I expect that a lot of the things he learned from me, especially in the 60's and 70's, were things he'd rather not have learned at all. But even in the worst times, he did his best to understand and he always, without fail, provided the unconditional love and support that most children yearn for and few actually receive.

In my adult years, I came to know my father as a person. And I was fortunate enough to be able to travel with him and experience the joy and exhilaration he derived from his work and his colleagues around the world. And the more time I spent with him, the more I was awed by his consummate teaching skills, his gentle modesty and his extraordinary sensitivity to people. He taught me so many things over those years:

To never give up. To not be afraid to try something new or different, but to thoroughly research it before jumping in. To learn from failure rather than fear it. To look at an apparent life-altering disaster as an opportunity to change direction rather than as a roadblock. To believe in the inherent goodness of people and to treat everyone with dignity and respect.

To appreciate that gentleness, strength, kindness and perseverance are not mutually exclusive. And that integrity and self respect are the core of what matter's most in both one's personal and professional life.

My father was a living example that every once in a while, the nice guy finishes first. Most people never get the satisfaction of realizing their most sought after goals. He did. He devoted his entire life to his research and lived long enough to see the results and share the excitement and exultation with his colleagues and friends around the world. And while that would probably be enough for most people, it was just a beginning for him.

Those of you who knew my father, knew that "leisure" was not a word that existed in his vocabulary. He had the same view of leaving this, his beloved medical center, and moving to Florida, that he had of going to the dentist for root canal work: necessary, couldn't be put off any longer, but awfully painful. For the five weeks he lived in Ft. Lauderdale, he was on the phone with one or another of you for a good part of each day. Without you, he was adrift. He left here in the summer, when many of you were away, and was looking forward to coming back for his farewell luncheon at the end of October. He missed you even before he left.

Three and a half years ago, after suffering his first stroke, he was in terrible shape and he knew it. He was seriously considering just giving up and letting go at that point. I was keeping vigil in his hospital room, and he would occasionally try to talk to me. As the night wore on, even though he was half paralyzed, barely able to speak and terribly uncomfortable with an NG tube down his throat, he went through the mental process of his situation and prognosis and then finally said - "I'm not ready to go yet. there's still too much to do." And I thought of this poem, by Dylan Thomas, that I had learned so many years before:

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Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
Because their words had forked no lightning they
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

In the end, my father did go gentle into that good night, and I believe that unlike three and a half years ago, he was clearly ready to do so. We are all left to rage against the dying of the light, perhaps, but in fact, that light is still so warm and so luminous, that it will always be with us. Thank you for coming here and sharing this time and your memories with us.

Carol Krugman

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