A Reflection

I have often marveled at the ability of others to stand up and speak about a loved one at such as emotional time. I wish I could because I want to share my thoughts about this wonderful man, but I know I am not capable. If I were, this is what I would say… A dear friend recently introduced me to a provocative poem, written by Linda Ellis, called “The Dash”. The poem signifies the importance of the dash that lands between the data of a person’s birth and the date of their death, often placed on their tombstone. The point of the poem is this… dates are irrelevant, but the dash in between them is what counts.

My father had quite a remarkable dash. If you knew him, you knew he was a kind and gentle man of great character, and he lived a very wonderful life that was filled with many, many blessings. He grew up in a loving home with his mother and father, and was the older brother to his two adoring sisters. He was very intelligent and an excellent student who learned to play the piano at an early age. His talent along with his personality allowed him to be the life of many a party!! He was a Loyola University and University of Chicago graduate, and an elementary school teacher whose dedication and work ethic took him up the ladder to having one of the highest level jobs in the Chicago Public School system.

He had a close family life as a youth, and when he wed my mother, he carries that over into his own exceptional marriage… one filled with love and respect. Both of our parents exposed my sisters and me to an amazing, well adjusted family environment and created a marriage template to which we all aspired. He was a great provider and took exquisite care of all of us. My father was funny when he wanted to be, but did more listening than talking. He was also a great audience and appreciated a quick wit. He enjoyed good people, good food, good music, and good television. He loved to watch TV, especially late at night. He loved Parky’s hotdogs and fries, gnocchi and braciole, Fannie May and milkshakes, the original Hawaii 5-0 and Seinfeld, Rocky, disco music, Begin the Beguine, (especially the Johnny Mathis disco version), bowling, and of course the Bears and the White Sox. He was proud of his heritage and devoted to his faith. He was an advocate of education as a means to improving one’s foundation as well as future opportunities.

He was old fashioned and strict in the way he raised us, never understanding the concept of the sleep-over and never allowing it. He was exceedingly careful and proper, maybe because he had all girls. As a driver, he was opposed to left turns and went out of his way to avoid them. He taught us to take note of our surroundings and observe any unsafe situations or unsavory characters, be aware of exits in crowded places, and be sure to always leave ourselves an out. His words of wisdom to stay out of harm’s way were repeatedly… “use your head”. He was non-technical, non-mechanical, non-handy and he wasn’t too good with complicated directions or information. He would always say… “show it to me on paper”. He was considerate and unassuming, lived within his means and taught us all to do the same. He had his priorities in order and made sure we did too. He was heroically fair and honest. He was respectful of rules. He did not make waves and was uncomfortable in the company of those who did. My aunt used to call him a soldier. Give him his orders and he followed them. He wasn’t assertive or loud or boisterous, yet could not be pushed around and always made his point with articulation and intelligence. He was an all-around class act, a man of God and an outstanding son, husband, father, grandfather, father in law, brother, brother in law, uncle, cousin, nephew, and friend.

Almost 24 years ago my father suffered a devastating heart attack that he barely survived. A group of miraculous doctors saved his life along with the prayers of our extended family and friends, and the shear perseverance of my mother. She would accept no other outcome. Her devotion to his recovery and all of the many medical setbacks he withstood since… was unwavering.

God’s gift of the last 24 years has allowed my father to walk all four of us down the wedding aisle. Most importantly, his survival gave him one of life’s awesome gifts, the grandfather experience… GoGo 2. Living to see the birth of all four grandchildren, watching their personalities develop and seeing the lovely young people they have become was his greatest joy. He adored them all, and I hope Michael, Haley, Danny and Elena realize and appreciate what a find example of a human being was in their midst while they had him. My prayer for them is that they conduct themselves as they mature and throughout their adulthood, in a manner that would continue to make him proud.

Though these past several days and months have been filled with the repercussions of a debilitating disease, my mother has always made sure that my dad had the very best care and every opportunity to make the very most of every day… while rarely leaving his side herself.

It has been very, very difficult to watch such a vital man slowly succumb to illness, keeping a portion of his mind, but losing his mobility and his ability to express himself. He did not deserve any of that, and frankly, it probably would have been a hell of a lot easier on him if he died that September 12, 1990, but I am not sure any of us could have handled his death that day. God knew that. He did not spare my father. He spared US!! But now after watching him suffer, his passing makes it a little easier was his typical style. He was just so incredibly loving, and all of us felt it every day of our lives. So today, though we are heartbroken, we need to celebrate my father, and remember all the good things he was, the lessons he taught us, and most importantly the remarkable example he set. We need to let him go in peace. Peace for him and peace for us too. Though it is very difficult to say goodbye to him physically, it gives my mom, my sisters and me great comfort to know that so many from our family and so many friends are there to greet him in Heaven where he is now unencumbered by all of those physical limitations, in God’s care, and hopefully, once again, playing the heck out of that Baby Grand.

Reset well sweet man. Make no mistake, YOUR dash was inspirational, if not legendary. I only hope all of ours is half as extraordinary. You will be loved forever and missed until we meet again.