

Eulogy for
Murray J Kurland
Nov 23, 1928 – Feb 29, 2016
by Todd Murray Kurland

Saturday, March 5, 2016

Kids are great at keeping things in perspective. When our 13 year old son, Zhenya, came home from school on Monday afternoon, we said 'we have some sad news'. He looked at me with that forlorn look... 'did the basketball game get canceled again?'. I said 'something like that'.

We didn't expect Dad to pass away this week, but we understood when it happened. He was still vibrant and sharp. Still beating his sons at Upwords, a Scrabble type of board game our family has played forever. But his heart and strength had become much weaker over the past year. He was becoming more forgetful. And there was an emerging problem with a heart valve new chest pains.

I woke up Tuesday morning after the call from my sisters, feeling sad. I was thinking about Dad, and the loss was sinking in. The calls and visits, the family get-togethers in Palatine when we or the boys were in town. Just two weeks ago when we were visiting from Boston, Dad was taking my son to Costco for their favorite \$1.50 foot long hotdog and soda, and giving Amy and Steve's son Maclane and Zenya the grief that only a grandpa can dish out to teenage boys.

But then something else started running around my head. Wait a second. Sad? Really? Isn't this the kind of life where you throw the Irish wake? With dancing, singing, kegs of beer and cheerful toasts? Maybe we get Eric up here to sing Kereoke. It was pretty hard to stay sad thinking about Dad's life.

Here is a snapshot: 87 years, 6 healthy kids, all married, 10 healthy grandkids, dancing at his granddaughter Rachels wedding, wonderful and loving nieces, nephews and sister in law, 48 years of a great marriage with the love of his life, countless friends from all walks of life, 2 years in the Navy sailing the Pacific, 2 successful careers, 68 countries visited, 10 thousand rounds of golf, 2 hole-in-ones, 2 red convertibles, and then dying peacefully, in his sleep, in his own bed, in his family home, after spending time at Christmas and then just weeks and days before with each of his kids and grandkids, after Sunday dinner with Amy

and Steve's family in Palatine, coming home, an episode of CSI New York, a glass of wine, go to bed, go to heaven.

That was dad's life. It was about as blessed as they come. And as our neighbor, Mr. Benson used to say, 'Not too shabby'.

Lissa and Keith's daughter, Sophie, said it best on her facebook page. "Grandpa, all I want is what you had." Sign me up, too, Sophie.

I'm Todd, Murray's oldest son and namesake (my middle name is Murray).

Thank you for coming today. Dad had many extended families; his Navy buddies, his college friends and friends from Milwaukee, our neighborhood friends of 53 years, his golf mates and friends at Boulder Ridge and Golf Nation, and his friends from our school district and the Harper College cardio rehab program. Each of you were the tapestry of dad's life, and enriched his life with your friendship.

We all know Dad, Murray, Uncle Murphy, and Grandpa from 1 or more parts of his life. I'd like to take a little time to fill in those other years.

You've probably heard the expression 'not since sliced bread'... well, sliced bread was invented the year that Murray was born in 1928. It was the year that Amelia Earhart flew across the Atlantic. And Mickey Mouse was born. Charlie Chaplin was a movie star and the Ford Model A was the new car off the line. It had only been 20 years since the Cubs last won the World Series.

Not that Dad would care too much about the Cubs back then. Dad grew up a Yankees fan, born in the Bronx, and raised in Manhattan a block west of Central Park. He was the son of a Puerto Rican Catholic mother, Rosita and a Russian Jewish father, Max. You can imagine how that was working out for their parents in that era. Dad's middle name is a single letter because his 2 grandmothers couldn't agree on the Jewish Jerome or the Christian John. So J it was.

Rosita and Max were just kids themselves when Dad was born, still in their teens. They divorced when Dad was 2 years old, and he was raised in his Puerto Rican grandmothers apartment with his mother and uncles. It was there that he learned to speak Spanish, and he added Portuguese later when doing business in South America. He played ball in the street and went to Yankee games with money he saved from delivering groceries for the Jewish deli around the corner. Every 2 weeks he would take the train to Staten Island to see a movie and go to

the Automat with his dad. The Automat was a New York City institution starting in 1919, a cafeteria with a wall of small doors, like a large vending machine. You would push a nickel into a slot like a Laundromat, and open the door to select your sandwich, pie or cake.

Dad referred to his grandmother as a saint; they had what was a middle class life for that time. Both grandparents worked hard to support the kids, she in a garment factory and he on the trains. They had rice and beans every night, which he still loves, and with meat added on Sundays. They sent Murray to the Bronx School of Science, a new high school, opened in 1938, dedicated to science and math. Dad would take the train to school every morning. The school is still ranked in the top 50 high schools in the country, and is the source of the greatest number of Nobel Prize winners, with 9.

From there, his mother sent him far across the country to the University of Wisconsin to study engineering. Dad was only 17 when he got to college. He arrived at the school Union dressed sharply in his brown 3 piece NY suit, immediately standing out from the farmer's sons and daughters in their red and white Wisconsin Badger coveralls. As we all know, Dad quickly fell in line with the Badger attire.

He was taken under the wing of 2 girls from Port Washington, Patsy and Judy Lee, whose family would become his own second family over the next years. He lived that summer with them, bonding with Mr. Eldridge Lee as the 2 of them built a basement together under the Lee's summer cottage on Lake Michigan. Mr. Lee taught him about tools and construction, and dad passed that knowledge on to us boys. The Lee cottage would become our favorite weekend holiday each summer, going for bratwurst, summer sausage and a day at the beach.

Grandpa Lee, as we called him, was dad's mentor in many ways. Dad credits him with his sense of responsibility and his discipline. He would use that discipline later in life, after his first heart attack at age 49, to stop smoking his beloved cigars, and to commit to a cardio rehab exercise program. 3 days a week, religiously, for the next 25 years until the program ended. He then continued to work out at a new golfers health club that had just opened just a half mile from our house in Palatine, Golf Nation. Golf Nation was a god send for him and our family, because it enabled him to continue the exercise that was so important to his health.

We all know Dad was a bit of a party animal. One of his nicknames growing up was 'Moe the Beast'. And after a too-wild first year at college, the UW was getting ready to kick him in the keister. He was going to need some structure in his life to get back on track. With Mr. Lee's counsel, he decided to join the Navy. And his next 2 years were spent aboard the USS General William Mitchell, supporting troop and equipment transports in the Pacific following WW II. Dad was an electrician on the ship, and was also in charge of the ship's movie room, a position he appreciated because it meant he was first off the ship when they came to port (so he could run to get the latest movies).

Dad returned to the University of Wisconsin on the GI Bill, and earned his degree in Electrical Engineering. His first job was in Milwaukee, as an inside sales engineer at a power line company called AP Controls. Our mom, Alice Larsen, a Danish farm girl from Racine, had just started working there as the President's Executive Secretary.

Dad recalled seeing mom and falling in love at first sight. Alice rebuked Murray's first attempts to go on a date, concerned about dating someone in the company. But Murray persisted, and Alice acquiesced when Murray changed jobs and went to Line Material. Dad worked his way into Mom's heart by driving her down to Racine to visit her mother each Sunday, something we would continue to do as a family even after moving to Palatine. They fell in love, were married, and moved to Brown Deer, just outside Milwaukee; where the first 4 of us kids were born. Carrie, Todd, Amy and Lissa.

5 years in to family life, Dad and Mom started looking for new employment that would provide more security for the family. Phil McLaughlin, a friend and colleague at Line Material, arranged an informal interview and meeting for Murray and Alice to meet John Conrad and his wife Arlys. John was the President of S&C Electric, an established and respected power utility supplier on the north side of Chicago. The interview was at a restaurant, and dad bumped into a car while pulling into the parking space. It was a small scratch, but Dad left a note on the windshield with his contact information.

Mr. Conrad would tell us later that after that meeting in the restaurant, he was hesitant to hire Dad. Dad had worn yellow socks to the interview and Mr. Conrad wasn't quite sure what to make of that.

But when he found the note from Murray on his car in the parking lot, he changed his mind. And that began Dad's wonderful career at S&C. Building the International Sales division, traveling the world with his briefcase and golf clubs, and helping S&C grow from a 12M company to a 300M company during his tenure. Granted, there is a second story about that first restaurant interview. That John's wife Arlys liked Alice so much at that first meeting, that she TOLD her husband to hire Murray.

Dad's second career began shortly after his retirement from S&C, at age 62, as a volunteer at Palatine's elementary school District 15. In the beginning, Dad would go in every Monday morning and Monday afternoon for 2 to 3 hours to read with Spanish and Portuguese kids who were learning English as a second language. Dad was patient and supportive, and a great role model for the many kids he worked with. The kids called him Mr. Murray. Later he moved to the library and resource room, helping out Sue Baez, the school librarian, who would become another of his lifelong friends. He spent 20 years in this role, culminating with a special award from the school district shortly before his second retirement. It also let him keep an eye on Lucas and Maclane.

There are several threads that weave together Dad's life for all of us.

The red and white of the Wisconsin Badgers and the green and gold of the Green Bay Packers. Dad has always loved football, from the days when he first tried out for the Wisconsin Badger football team. But he may have loved the apparel even more. Dad's passion is anything Badger Red or Packer Green and Gold, and he has the socks, pants, shirts, hats, coats, gloves, ties, belts, tie clips, photo frames, blankets, pencils, ornaments, golf tees, towels, balls, bags, shoes and umbrellas, garden flags, yard ornaments, floor mats, rugs, bottle openers, flower pots, and University of Wisconsin Badger Kleenex to prove it. A legacy that is living on in Sacramento with Eric and Lisa's daughter Kelsey, who at age 10 still does not own a single piece of clothing that isn't green and gold.

Another thread is golf. If you saw our basement full of clubs, by last count there are 35 bags down there, you might call it an obsession. He still was hanging on to Mom's old Toyota Camry, probably because it had a large trunk that held 3 or 4 more bags. Growing up, he would wake me up at 5 AM on summer days, to run out and play 9 holes at Palatine Hills before going to work. I have to smile when I think how hard he tried, albeit in vain, to get me to slow down my backswing. He had every golfing book and gadget he could find. Thank goodness amazon.com

didn't exist back then. Dad was such a fanatic that he would even pack his clubs when travelling overseas on a business trip. Who brings golf clubs to Manila? For me, if it won't fit in Carry On, it probably shouldn't be brought.

When Dad and Mom retired, they joined as inaugural members of a new golf club out in Lake In The Hills, called Boulder Ridge. His membership there over the past 20 years was precious to him and mom. The owners, staff, and friends that he and mom met there were a wonderful source of enjoyment for both of them in their retirement, and we all enjoyed many family occasions at Boulder Ridge for Sunday brunch, dinners and golf outings. We all took full advantage of Dad's monthly food minimum. After mom died, Boulder Ridge and Golf Nation were a refuge of caring and support for Dad.

And of course his wife and family.

Eric and Rob were born shortly after moving to Palatine. And the next 25 years were marked off by birthdays, graduations and the annual Christmas card photo. It was a simple and carefree time for us kids, living in a quiet mid-western neighborhood with dear friends and families growing up together. With annual Thanksgiving get-togethers with family at Aunt Myrt and Uncle Harolds. A simple and carefree childhood gift bought with mom and dad's hard work and effort.

In 2001, Mom was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and she passed away in June of 2002, after seeing 1 more birthday for each of her kids. 14 years later, her presence is still felt in the house. There were always new pictures popping up from old boxes and drawers that Dad would find and put out. And prints of daisy's, mom's favorite, that Dad would come across and bring home (usually while garage shopping for more golf clubs).

Dad had moved on from Mom's passing. He just brought mom along with him. And in doing so, he helped keep mom alive for all of us.

Mom and Dad's dedication to family is represented in each of us. Carrie's kindness and responsibility, Amy's caring and tenaciousness, Lissa's patience and creativity, Eric's leadership and resolve, Rob's courage and intellect, and my perspective and awareness, and humility and sales skills, and wisdom, empathy and vision, and most importantly, my ability to beat my brothers at Upwords on a regular basis.

Grandpa's greatest love was for his grandkids. Rachel, Sophie and Jack. Carly. Connor, Cameron and Kelsey. Lucas and Maclane. And Zhenya. He loved them every day, caring about each of them, watching them grow up, attending their games, talking with them on the phone, and enjoying their visits.

We're going to miss having Dad in our lives. A parent's love is one of a kind and we're grateful we've had his for so long. We're going to miss him for ourselves, and perhaps even more so for our kids, who have enjoyed that same love times 10.

Dad's dream is fulfilled. He had a long life, he lived his life to the fullest, and he is now in heaven with mom.

As Carrie and Mike's daughter Carly said so beautifully on her Facebook page, "he'll be in our hearts forever".

Thank you.

