



Donald B Neuman

17 September 1934 – 4 November 2017

He was a first generation American, his parents having both immigrated from Poland to Milwaukee in the 1920s. My dad grew up in Milwaukee surrounded by a close extended family. My grandparents owned a small grocery store on Milwaukee's south side and, of course, it was a family business with all members of the family pitching in, including my Dad.

Many of the things that were important to my dad throughout his life were picked up at a very early age. For instance, my dad had a life long love affair with trolleys and trains, and even wrote a book about the Milwaukee trolley system. From the age of seven he was permitted (well, maybe permitted is too strong a word), he took it upon himself to start riding the trolleys back and forth. He liked to tell the story about going downtown by himself one day when he was just seven or eight and running into his grandfather. His grandfather asked him where his parents were and my Dad said he was alone. My grandfather asked if he knew how to get home, and my father said sure. So my grandfather said, "okay, see you later." My father also developed an early love of classical music which he carried with him right to his bed in the ICU where the nurses said his was "the party room" because we were playing classical music that my dad liked.

It's ironic on a number of levels that Dad would succumb to heart failure. For one thing, it was so out character for him to succumb to anything. He lived his life finishing the things he started.

He was never a quitter. When my Dad was in his last few years of high school, my Grandfather's business failed from a combination of new competition from chain grocery stores and an employee who embezzled money from the business. As a result, as my dad got ready to go to college, he had to work, save, and live at home for the first two years, only to head to UW-Madison to join his friends during his Junior year. Even then he had to work odd jobs pay for his tuition and room and board. He went back to school at the age of 30 to get his Masters Degree

and PhD despite having three children to support, and a fourth soon on the way. He worked as a Professor in the School of Education for almost thirty years for one University, a commitment that it is extremely rare these days. He was steadfast in his love and caring for his parents; attending faithfully to their needs as they aged. And he found success even in retirement through his many volunteer activities.

But of course the flip side of being unfaltering is being stubborn. And my Dad could be stubborn. He refused to purchase anything unless he felt he was getting a good deal. I can recall going car shopping with him one day when he was interested in purchasing a Pontiac Sunbird. We went to the dealership and my dad started negotiating with salesman. Back and forth they went making offers and counteroffers until they were just \$50 apart. But the salesman refused to come down any further, so my father got us up and we walked out of the dealership, never to return. When it happened I remember being incredulous that he could walk away over \$50. But that was my dad, he refused to make any sort of deal that didn't feel right to him.

The other thing that I find so ironic about my Dad's passing is that it was his heart that gave out because my dad had a huge heart. In the 1970s, as Jews were just starting to be allowed to leave the Soviet Union, my parents volunteered to be champions for several Russian families that were new to Milwaukee and the United States. There was nothing in it for them except to be kind to strangers who needed their help. And my Dad's big heart also had room for anyone new to our family, whether it was a new daughter in law or the friends and significant others of his grandchildren. Indeed, one of the things that has been so touching about the tributes to my dad is to hear the newest members of family, the spouses and significant others of his grandchildren, speak so glowingly about the way my dad welcomed them into the family.

My Dad had many qualities that even those close to him might not know about because of his humility. He was a good athlete, ran track in high school and even in his forties could outrun any of his kids. He also had an incredible memory. He knew the composer of virtually any classical music piece, and could bring it to mind so quickly that he won a name that tune contest on our local classical music station about once a month. He would have won it more often but the rules said you could only win once a month. Ironically, my father taught us to question everything, so we regularly threw the BS flag on my Dad's stories; but much more often than not, his memory turned out to be right.

My dad also taught himself calligraphy and drawing and entertained his grandchildren with his elaborate drawings. He could draw an incredibly straight line freehand - if I gave you a straightedge and had my Dad do a line free hand, I would be willing to bet this his line would be straighter.

And perhaps the straight line is a good metaphor for my Dad's life. He lived without pretense; he knew where he came from and never lost his sense of gratitude for where life had taken him. He was the most moral person I've ever met. If he was given the wrong change at a store he returned it; if he was undercharged for a product, he pointed it out. And he was forever loyal - most of his friends were people he had known for thirty or more years, and he remained extremely close with his childhood best friends until the end.

But to say that my Dad kept to the straight and narrow is not to say he was boring. He certainly had political views that he was unafraid to express. He was not a religious man, but he had a deep spirituality. He was a huge fan of Wisconsin sports teams, although his fatalistic approach to watching sports sometimes made it hard to be with him (and yes, I know, that trait is apparently passed down through the Y chromosome directly to the third child).

Professionally, he was ahead of his time. Before it became popular to think this way, he was dead set against rote learning in the classroom. He believed in providing opportunities for creative thinking and encouraged teachers to understand that every child has a different way of learning, and that to figure out that child's preferred method, teachers needed to understand the

whole child. He was also not a big fan of grades, and we used to laugh about what an easy grader he was - indeed, it would have been hard to earn less than a B- in my father's class if you showed up once in a while and had a pulse.

But of all his qualities, the one that stands it out is his devotion and love for his family. If only the Olympics had a competition for kvelling; my father would be a have multiple Gold Medals.

I'm sure all of you have occasionally thought, as I have, about why it is that we wait until composing a eulogy to talk about all the wonderful things we admire in the people we love. That was not an issue for my Dad. He constantly praised his children and grandchildren and spoke about their qualities.

My dad thought about, and talked about, how lucky he was, and he encouraged us to think the same way. I recall having a conversation with my father when I was in high school in which he asked me to think about the chances of any of us being here. Our parents had to have met, and their parents had to have met and so on. And even then he told me that there are billions of sperm and multiple eggs so you have to get just the right combination (and yes, at this point I was thinking, Dad, gross, why are you telling me this). But he went on and said that once you make it through that labyrinth, you have to get lucky with the family into which you enter. And, more than anything else, you have to have the good fortune to find your better half somewhere along the way.

My Dad left no doubt that he felt he had won the lottery of life. You know how the Powerball lottery works. You need to get all five numbers right. And he had that - he was born into a family with loving, hardworking, moral parents, and an adoring sister. He basked in the warmth of a close, extended family. He had friends and intelligence and drive. But you can't win the Powerball lottery unless you also get correct that sixth number: the Powerball itself. And for my Dad, the Powerball came along in Madison in 1956 when he met Barbara Heavenrich. And while my Dad was generally a humble person, he was not shy about letting the world know that, by meeting and marrying my Mother, he had won the lottery.

And, by the way, he knew he had the right girl on their very first date. You see my Dad had a great sense of humor, and he could be counted on for a pun or a joke or pulling your leg at any time. My parents first date was at a place called Picnic Point in Madison and one of their jobs was to gather wood for a fire. They went out into the woods to gather some up and my father said to this girl whom he had just met, as this was a blind date, “wouldn’t it be funny if we came back from the woods with you carrying all the wood.” When my Mom agreed, my dad knew he had found the right girl for him.

Their marriage was a true partnership. In fact, the partnership was so stable and harmonious that it freaked me out in those few moments when their voices were raised or they disagreed in any way. I can recall one day when I was about ten that I had to stay home from school because I was under the weather. I heard my parents disagreeing about something in a slightly raised voice. This was such an out of the ordinary occurrence in our house that I just assumed it meant my parents’ marriage was faltering so I ran down the stairs in tears and begged them not to get divorced. But of course, there was never any risk of that. One does not throw away the winning lottery ticket and my Dad knew he had that in my mother.

It’s a truism that when we’re young we think that our parents have all the answers. That was certainly true of me and my dad. And then, at some point in our adolescence, we start to wonder whether our parents have any answers at all. But we have children of our own, and suddenly the answers our parents had when we were young start to make sense again. But what we ultimately realize is that the answers really don’t matter very much. What does matter is the wisdom and love that stand behind those answers. I relied on my Dad for that wisdom and that unquestioning love, and even though he’s been gone for less than 72 hours, I realize that I did not soak up nearly enough of it in the time we had together.

Compared to some, my Dad may not have left a very wide mark on this earth; but his imprint runs very deep. I think our job is to make sure that the canyon of goodwill he constructed during his lifetime lives on and expands through all of us. I can only pray that I’m up to the task.

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## Shiva Service

As my three brothers, sister-in-law's and nieces and nephews said during the funeral, my dad was an amazing man. He was smart, funny, generous and he loved us all very much. But my relationship with my dad was perhaps a bit unique as the youngest and only girl in the family. While by all measures my dad was incredibly egalitarian in all the most important decisions, growing up I cried foul at every turn when I felt that I was being treated differently than the "boys." We would butt heads and I often blamed my father too much for my failures – whether it was my failed baseball career, driving test, or lack of popularity and I certainly did not give him enough credit for my successes. But through all of my complaints, my dad remained my greatest cheerleader. And while he loved to play devil's advocate, which sometimes drove me nuts, ultimately, I knew he was always in my corner and would support me no matter what.

My dad was a vocal person, sharing his worries, imparting advice and providing opinions but also telling us how proud he was of the people we had become. He would talk of our strengths, and rarely mention our weaknesses. He would "kvell" about his kid's work ethic, intelligence, and people skills but he was never prouder of me then when I became a mother and began raising Isabel. On the Sunday after Isabel's bat mitzvah, just three weeks ago, he pulled me aside to tell me as he had done thousands of times over the past 12 years, how he believed that much of Izzy's successes were because of what I provided her as a mother. What I should have said to him was that the mother and person that I am today is because of the incredible father and role model he has been to me. I am my daddy's daughter – stubborn, opinionated, passionate, and hopefully one day I will equal him in his generosity of spirit and kindness.

My dad was a teacher his entire life. And as I think about his life and passing, there is one lesson that has perhaps been the most important for me and that is to tell people how you feel about them before they are gone. While actions may speak louder than words, it is important to complement those actions by telling those around us how much we love and care for them, how special they are to us. My dad never worried about being vulnerable or embarrassed, he told us often how much he admired and loved us. I worry that I did not say that enough to him, and plan in the future to say it to all of you.

While my father was 83 years old in body, in spirit he was a very young man. He was relatively healthy until the end, dancing with us at my niece's wedding in September and Izzy's bat mitzvah in October. And Dr. Donald B. Neuman was one of the silliest men that I have ever known. From playing monster with us as children, where he pretended to be a monster robot and chase us around the house, to his crazy accents, terrible puns, and endless knock-knock jokes as Uncle Don-Don with his nephew Andrew, my dad was comfortable enough in his intelligence and person to also be light-hearted and a bit mad.

I would be remiss if I did not touch on his connection with Isabel. If he did cartwheels for us, it was handsprings for Isabel. They had a mutual appreciation club like no other. My father provided Isabel unconditional love and she reciprocated. As patriarch of our family, he welcomed our littlest Neuman into the clan and made certain that she knew how wanted and special she was. From the first moment that he saw her, when she was only 5 weeks old and still in Guatemala, he was smitten. And if it was even possible his love for her grew stronger as she aged. The two of them could speak a made-up language together for hours, or recite Princess Bride quotes back and forth, or play on the floor with matchbox cars and trains in Iron River. He and my mom helped care for Isabel when I would travel, and while my mom would make sure Isabel did her homework and showered, my dad would feed her Nutella for breakfast, read one more book with her, and extend her bedtime so that they could play together just a little bit more. He always said what a gift she was for him, but the true gift was the love he gave to her and to all of us.

As Isabel wrote on her Instagram, we will miss my dad for the rest of our lives. But we will tuck his love into our hearts and hope that it sustains us. His memory will forever be a blessing.

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