

The Greatest Thing About My Dad

By son Brad Percefull

Because I did not want my grief to interfere with the comments I wanted to make to you today, I asked Reverend Martz to read the thoughts I prepared about dad.

Cathy and I were driving back to Delta Sunday afternoon after spending Thanksgiving weekend with the family in Denver. I was proud to have been able to help with dad's care, during what turned out to be the last few days of his life. On Saturday morning, he was trying to tell us something in a weakened voice and leaning toward mother. Both were in bed together.

I thought I recognized the word "kiss," but wasn't entirely sure, so told mom that I thought she should pucker up. Sure enough, that was what dad wanted and some great smooching then commenced! What a lovely sight that was.

Going west on I 70 from Denver, I began thinking of dad's life and all the things he did over the years with the family. So I put this little perspective together based on areas along the highway where events took place with him.

Topping the hill near the El Ranch Restaurant is the turnoff toward Evergreen, and a short distance from there is a grand lodge called Greystone, where mom and dad honeymooned in 1951. They showed it to me for the first time in about 1980 on a trip to the area. What a beautiful setting.

A ways further west is Arapaho Basin ski area. Dad took the family to Arapaho for a day of skiing in 1964. The road in those days, known as highway 40, was 2 lanes all the way through the mountains, and you had to cross Loveland Pass, as there was no tunnel then. It was a pretty full day to travel all that way, ski, then return on the two lane road.

Sometime mid-day, dad was skiing down the hill behind his kids, doing his best to record the action on his home movie camera, when he caught an edge and took a spill. It wasn't a pleasant one. We could tell because, looking at the film later, the camera recorded the expression on his face as he hit the snow. And, the ski patrol diagnosed a spiral fracture of his right leg. Dad was in the hospital for several days and took a year recovering, first with steel pins in joints and a full leg cast, graduating to shorter castes over time. He didn't let that slow him down, as he adapted to travel by throwing his right leg over the "hump" on the floorboard, and operating the pedals with his left foot. The crutches were beside him the passenger seat. He continued to ski from time to time well into his seventies, with buddies like Al Burger.

Then a few miles further west is Lake Dillon. In about 1970, dad bought a condo in a new complex on the shore named, The Anchorage. The family enjoyed many fun weekend trips, mostly in the summer. Dad had a thirteen foot Lone Star sailboat configured like a sloop, which he enjoyed sailing there and on Cherry Creek. This boat was fast, but had a problem in that if it was allowed to keel over too far, the cockpit would fill with water up to the gunnels, and there was no way to expel it. The boat had to be towed to shore. I realized dad was a quick learner

when he filled the cockpit sailing with a friend in the middle of Lake Dillon. The water was about 55 degrees and luckily a power boat was nearby to pull them to shore. He only did that once!

Another time, and I were racing Bruce Bigelow, Dr. Gene and Alice Bieglow's son around the buoy field in the bay. Bruce had a "sailfish" which was essentially a large surfboard with a gig sail, and it was a fast boat. We agreed on a course, and set off. Dad was at the helm and I handling the sails. Bruce pulled way ahead, when he overshot a turn in the course and dad I got back in front. Bruce was rapidly gaining on us when dad told me to prepare to pull up the centerboard on his command. We were bearing between a moored boat on our left and the buoy on our right, and I knew what he was thinking. There was a submerged line between the two. I followed his commands; we sailed over the line and turned to watch Bruce as he followed close behind. Sure enough, Bruce left his centerboard down, and dad and I laughed as we watched him slow, converging the boat and the buoy on the Sailfish! Yes, we won that race.

As a side note, construction of I/70 from Silverthorne to the tunnel bores was in progress. A couple buddies of mine, Charlie Collins and Mark Polk, were staying in the condo at Dillon for a winter weekend. None of us had the money to pay for lift tickets at the local ski areas, so we decided to ski behind the car. I/70 was just four lanes of gravel road and closed to traffic starting where the big Silverthorne exchange is now located and ran all the way to the tunnel. It was a Saturday, so no construction work was being done and there was 6 inches of fresh snow on the roadbed. Charlie had a couple of thirty foot long pieces of rope we had made in boy Scouts, so we turned onto the highway grade and tied them onto the back of his '58 Chevy. He drove and Mark and I skied I/70! And this history making event wouldn't have happened had dad not had the place at The Anchorage.

Anyway, back to dad.

Yet another 30 miles or so west from Dillon is Vail. In 1965 dad went partners with Doctors Melzer, Muffly, Mijer, Henderson, and Boal, each putting up \$5,000 and built a fine duplex which they named Seven Vails. The family had many, many wonderful trips in both winter and summer. One trip was over a Christmas holiday probably around 1975 where we met our cousins, the Goodins, who also had a place at the Crossroads in Vail.

A few miles west of Vail, near Wolcott, is where Dan, dad, West and I met for a great weekend of fishing in the Eagle River, and golf at Avon. During the late 1980's and 1990's, the four of us had great "guy trips" annually to places like Creed, Walden, Blue Mesa, the Gunnison Gorge, San Miguel and a fantastic trip to the Big Horn River on the Crow Reservation in southern Montana. We always looked forward to our trips together. Wesley one time on a guy's fishing trip, at about age 14, got dad a bit irritated. Seems dad didn't appreciate Wes jumping on dad's bed. While dad was in it.

Let's now go farther west to where the Colorado River joins the Eagle River. North of that place is some nice high country called Sweetwater. My boy Scout troop had annual "long term" campouts that lasted a full week. We purified our own water and prepared meals from envelopes of dehydrated food. Because dad's work was so demanding of his time, he never was able to

spend an entire week at camp, but he always joined us for two or three days. In about 1964 or so, the Troop was camped at Deep Lake. Dad joined us for a couple of nights. I remember having gotten into my sleeping bag about 9:30, and laid there looking at the stars through the dark of night. About ten, I heard the sound of Taps being played on a cornet. The tune rang out over the lake and the valley in perfect pitch. I knew my dad was sounding the call of the night's rest for us scouts, and was thankful that he brought his favorite instrument.

He was a fine musician, starting with the trombone. He played an unusual one, having valves like a trumpet rather than the more common slide. But he gravitated to the trumpet and then the cornet, which his father also played with a high degree of accomplishment. Dad played music along the lines of Dixieland jazz with other great friends like Frank Zarlengo, Don O'Neill, Sure Downs, Bill Pontarelli, Bill Scott, and Gene Peterson. There were many others, including in the Englewood Lions club band, that dad so much enjoyed playing with that I wish I could recall to acknowledge.

To the northwest of Deep Lake is Buford, Colorado. It is located on the White River and was the site of one of mom and dad's famous annual fall fishing trips with close friends. Over the years, the group that called themselves "fish and birdie" club consisted of Harold and Madeline Rust, Bill and Jeannie Nies, Ernie and Hazel Wilson, George and Perky Allen, Roy and Beanie Lanniger, John and Dottie Denhof, Ben and Flo Meyers, Ben and Dory Nazaremus, Aleron and Peg Larson and Ted and Jeannie Will. What a group! Ernie Wilson had a chili recipe that required some fairly hot chili powder that he obtained from Hatch, NM. He always had a quip about the after effects of eating his specialty. One year, he had dad, mom, and the others rolling on the floor when he cautioned them to use care to bleed off the gastric pressure. "Otherwise, you might scream!"

Moving further to the west along I/70 is Glenwood Springs, where dad and mom would take us small fries in the late 1950's and early 60's for week long summer swim vacations at the Hot Springs Lodge and Pool. At the time, the pool had a very large island with a major fountain spouting skyward in the west, or deep end. The pool also had high walls that included actual waterfalls that dropped two feet into the pool. Folks would congregate under the falls to enjoy the action of the moving water. And, this pool had large floating logs! They had been peeled of bark and one could hang their arms over the top of them and just float around. We all got a kick out of Annette who really relished the pool on crowded summer days. She would take a deep breath, swim under water to some unsuspecting fellow, pinch his fanny, and then retreat underwater to safety, while the rest of us watched his reaction from a distance. Had dad know this was occurring, we all would have been in trouble. Glenwood was always such fun for both mom and dad seemed to enjoy the water, sun and small town. After the swim, we were allowed to cross the street and play in the automobile junk yard, which was located next to highway 40 where the Village Inn Pancake House is located today.

And then there were places like Redstone, Marble and Rifle where dad's most excellent nurse for many years, Hazel Blake has ties, and Meeker and many others. Each has a story that I could tell about dad and mom being there. And that is just along a small portion of the I/70 corridor.

While not making impressions west of Denver, my father carried the burden of many hundreds of the ill on his shoulders. He left for work before I awakened each morning and, after a family dinner hour between seven and eight pm, was back at the hospital helping the sick until after I went to bed at night. This was six and a half days a week for about fifty three years, until his retirement in 1989. I know that he took the problems of many ill patients to bed with him, thinking about their illness and devising ways to help. In June of 1989, his first month of retirement, he received literally hundreds of well-wishing cards from his former patients. He had struck a cord of love with each. And, of course, he never could have done this without the support, encouragement and backing our loving mother, and dad's wife, Ann.

Dad was so wise and he had a good measure of advice to dispense, mostly to his children. Although a man who sparing of words, what he did say was concise and to the point. These are some tidbits that I remember the most:

“Marry a woman with assets.” I thought about this one during my bachelorhood which lasted until turning 52, initially believing that he was recommending finding a wealthy woman to marry. But his actions told me something different. He chose a woman who did not bring wealth to the table, at least in the monetary sense. She brought assets greater than fold to his marriage, and to the family. And those are the assets of friendship, sharing, responsibility, hard work, and more hard work, caring, effort, positive attitude, and self reliance. There could be more adjectives that describe our mother, but I think those words come to most people's minds. Mine included. I love you, mom. Dad was so right.

Another tid-bit dad told me: “Charity starts at home.” When I was in high school and first heard this one, I wondered what it meant. We were told to go door to door at Halloween to “raise money for UNICEF.” And to sell cookies for this thing and do something else for some other potentially worthy recipient or help anyone with their hand out. This is all well and good. But his actions told me something different. He made sure that his efforts were focused first at home. His wife could buy food. His children had clothing and a warm home and books for an education. And most all, he set an example for all of us to follow. What he did, along with many in dad's generation, made American Great. Be self reliant! Everyone in the family helps each other in time of need! Charity starts at home! He was so right.

But here is the one dad told me that has had the biggest impact on me, and is likely the most relevant. A couple of years ago, mom and dad had decided to relocate to a nearby assisted living residence. Dan, Annette and I were helping to get their Briarwood home read to be listed for sale, meaning just about everything had to be moved out. Dad was standing next to me in the driveway as he watched a lot of personal property acquired over the previous fifty years being loaded into a truck, when he said three words: “time changes everything.”

He was so right.
He is so loved.
He will be so missed.
Your loving son.