

My Eulogy to my dad: Vernon Leslie McLean

My dad fought the good fight...and won!

It was very important to my dad to reach his 85th birthday and despite his pain and suffering, he somehow, at a base level tracked the days, hours and minutes and made it...exactly.

Thank you everyone for coming today. One can measure the success of a man's life by the other lives he touched and the number of people who loved him. Clearly, by the number of people here today, my dad touched the lives of many and there are many who loved him.

Research informs us that personal human values are formed very early in life and once developed, become the fabric of our soul and are very difficult, if not impossible to alter. While this is likely a generality and true for many, this certainly was not the case for my dad. Dad rose above his early childhood challenges and was a mentor and positive role model to his children and grandchildren and an exemplary husband to my mom.

Life started for my dad on September 24, 1930. He was the youngest of three children. He and his two sisters had a challenging early childhood ultimately leading my dad to set out on a life long journey at a very early age.

My dad often regaled his grandchildren with tales of his early adventures and those that were fondest memories for him were of his career in the military and particularly the Navy. Dad often spoke of the various ships he served on and the exotic places he travelled to while he was in the Navy. His most memorable places were Hawaii, Panama and South America.

My dad was a very family oriented man and upon marrying my mother in 1953, he transferred from the Navy to the Air Force which enabled him to spend more time at

home. However, those early days of exotic trips in the Navy inspired his desire to see more of the world, which led to a relocation of our family in 1963 from Winnipeg to Metz France, north east of Paris.

My earliest recollection of living in France is of the various family outings that we took. Of course we travelled to Paris, but also the French Riviera, Spain, Germany and a host of other countries. Each country and city that we travelled to held exciting adventures as we toured castles and other historic sites. As one would expect, we always travelled in style...as was the custom of the day, we could often be found in our European tent with other campers in huge campgrounds in and around major metropolitan centers.

In 1967 we returned home to Winnipeg, which enabled my dad and mom and our family to reconnect with my mom's side of the family. During these early years, I often wondered why my dad was away from home so much. I did not realize until later that all of my dad's hard work was to provide for his family and to further enhance his education. These were two values in particular that my dad held dear: the value of a close family and the value of a good education which he instilled in each of Greg, Lisa and me.

As children we did not see much of my dad's family; partly because most of them did not live in Manitoba. However, despite my dad's early childhood challenges, we did periodically visit with his father and his wife in Winnipeg, as well as his mother and sisters and other relatives in Alberta. Once again, family was very important and the consistent thread of these trips was to reconnect with family members who had moved away from Winnipeg.

Tenting and trailers gave way ultimately to the family cottage at Sandy Hook on Lake Winnipeg...and you guessed it...in the cottage next door was my Aunt Lyla and Uncle Bert...more family connections. For well over twenty years, the cottage at Sandy Hook was a magnet for family activity. Virtually every weekend from mid spring until mid-fall was spent at the lake.

There was a universal rule at the cottage. No TV. Cottage time was family time and if we were not down swimming in the lake, we were having roaring bon-fires in the back yard or playing games in the cottage. One of our favourite games was Aggravation which we played with colored marbles. As some of you may know, my dad had a color deficiency that prevented him from seeing some colors or variations of colors. You can only imagine the fun...or aggravation as my dad moved his as well as everyone else's marbles on the board.

Being a home and cottage owner provided many rewards as well as challenges to my dad. Dad was not particularly mechanically inclined and barely knew the difference between a hammer and a screw driver. However, that didn't prevent us from building recreation rooms, fences, decks or adding several hundred feet onto the Sandy Hook cottage. His motto was, "if we put enough nails into it, it will stand forever". Sure enough, we put several thousand nails into each of those projects and sure enough, they are still standing today.

My dad loved music and was particularly fond of the big-band swing era. Of course, where there is music there is also dancing. Often, both at home and at the cottage the music would queued up, furniture would be moved out of the way and dad and mom would be found dancing up a storm. Dancing was a very important part of my dad's life and he and my mom would often be found heading out of town with friends where they would join their other friends in square dancing or round dancing. This was a life-long activity that they pursued until just recently. At one point, my dad even tried to get Rachel, his eldest granddaughter to join him in clogging.

When you live in Winnipeg you really appreciate the summer weather. The same can't be said for the winter. Upon retirement, my dad and mom abandoned the cold, just after Christmas for the more moderate temperatures of the Gulf of Mexico on the emerald coast of Okaloosa Island, Florida. My dad loved the ocean and for fifteen or so years they abandoned Winnipeg just after Christmas and linked up with my Aunt Marge

and Uncle Stan in the same condominium complex as they migrated from Toronto to the Island as well. From day one, Wanda and I took our two daughters out of school in either January or February for a month and joined them. For many years dad enjoyed many activities including playing golf, going to the Island Miniature Golf course with his grandchildren, relaxing at the seaside with a beer eating live oysters on the half shell or mud bugs overlooking Bourbon Street in New Orleans. A favourite activity was attending Mardi Gras parades in Pensacola or Mobile Alabama. Everyone always enjoyed the parades and it was always a challenge as to who could catch the most beads and moon pies.

Everyone always knew who the Canadians were on the Island since, as soon as the water was 70 degrees fahrenheit, my dad could be found swimming in the surf and he was only one of a few in the water. Although he loved swimming in the ocean, he was always a little cautious about sharks and every year he would enquire with the locals as to whether or not there were sharks where we were swimming. The answer was always no, there aren't any sharks. I couldn't believe my dad's surprise when I fellow living in the same condo as them caught a huge shark just adjacent to where we swam....after all, it was the ocean.

Back in Winnipeg my dad continued to pursue his hobby of thirty plus years of wine making. My dad always enjoyed a little sport and once I got into the wine making hobby as well, we often joked about who made the best wine. I always joked with him that someday he would learn how to get it right. Even, later in life when I took over his wine making responsibilities, we continued to joke about who made the best wine despite the fact that his part of our wine making partnership was inserting the corks and applying the labels.

For some reason, which my dad never explained, he had a strong connection to the Jewish community. This translated into several activities including the family tradition of dancing to the song Sun Rise, Sun Set from the play, Fiddler on the Roof at the weddings of each of his children and grandchildren. He also thoroughly enjoyed his

Thursday lunch meetings with his Jewish buddies where they had guest speakers come to discuss their areas of expertise or current events.

For almost 35 years my dad and I enjoyed having lunch together on Friday where we would discuss the fascinating topics of politics, the crazy stuff that goes on in the federal public service and he would recount for me the topics of discussion at the latest meeting of the Lanny Remis group. I miss those Fridays already.

For many years after retirement there were only two seasons for my dad. The first was when he played golf in Canada...the second was when he played golf in Florida. It didn't matter where he was...whether visiting my sister and brother and their families in Lethbridge, he could always be found on a golf course...quite often with his grandsons.

My dad loved life and he lived it to the fullest. From my first memories of my dad, he always had a huge smile on his face as he pursued his life's ambitions. He got to see the world, he loved my mom, his children and grandchildren and was proud of each and every one of them.

On September 24th at 22:30 I kissed my dad's cheek and told him I loved him...he left this world 10 minutes later with his family at his side. Although he is no longer here, I will carry him in my mind and my heart until we meet again.

Doug McLean
September 30, 2015