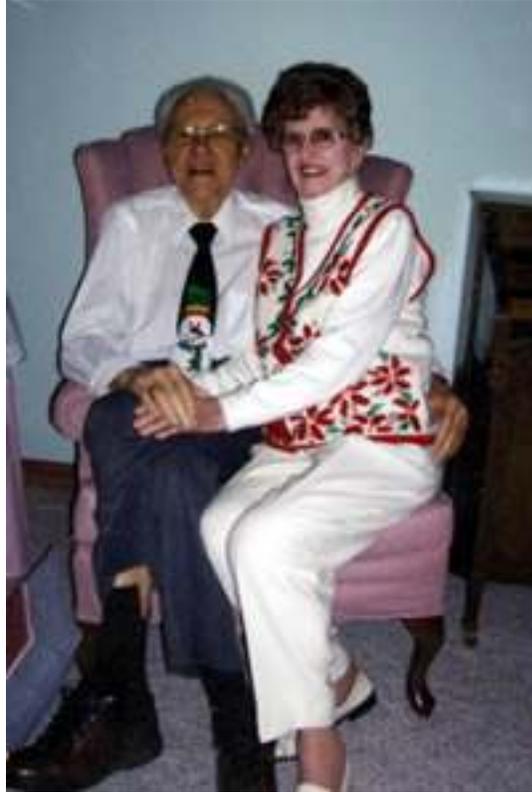


My Dad, My Hero

by
Jay Uhler



Bob Uhler



Dad at 89 and Mother at 91 at Christmas 2005

Bob Uhler was my Father. At his funeral I said, "When someone dies, there is a tendency to idealize them. I idealized my Father when he was alive." As a young teenager, I would walk across a street and picture myself as my Dad. Now, when I speak to strangers, as he often did, and they respond with appreciation, I say, "Thank you, Dad."

Respect all people

When he was in his late 80's, I decided to interview him about his view of life. The first thing he said was "Respect all people, and treat all people equally."

When I was fifteen, he was invited to leave General Armature and work with General Refractories. They wanted him because of his managerial skills and the way he treated people. That meant that he went to Kentucky a few months before we as a family relocated there.

A story is that in route, he went into a bathroom that was labeled, "Colored Only."

He had associated with people of African origin before and he simply followed men to the bathroom. I do not know the exact details, except that it got him into some trouble with the white authorities.

He was a strong, gentle man. The minister of Bagby Memorial Methodist Church described him as having "a fist of steel with a kid skin glove." He knew how to set limits in a caring way.

He was handsome and had a charming presence. Two different times while traveling for the company, he was mistaken for a famous person. Once when checking in at a hotel, the man at the front desk looked at him and said, "I will be with you in a moment, Mr. Bellamy", referring to the actor Ralph Bellamy. Another time a hotel person thought he was Liberace, a famous musician.

Shortly after he was born, his adoptive Father, Harry Uhler, and my Grandmother, Verna, were visiting Lock Haven Hospital to see the new baby of some friends. Harry was enamored with another baby in the nursery. The baby who attracted Harry's attention? It was my Dad.

Someone standing nearby noticed that Harry was captivated by the baby and told him that he was up for adoption. He was so attracted that he and my Grandmother stopped adoption proceedings for another baby and adopted Dad and named him Joseph Robert Uhler, who they called, Bob.

Sadly, Harry Uhler died before my Dad was a year and a half years old.

He was never told he was adopted until he was in his sixties, when I brought the family "secret" into the open by having my Grandmother tell him. He and I visited her in Pennsylvania for that purpose. Later, as we went to the cemetery with the funeral director making plans for her burial, he thanked me.

He had known since he was twenty when he walked into the room at a family gathering and overheard someone mention that he was adopted. He never said anything to his Mother because "If she didn't want me to know, then I didn't want to tell her that I knew." He was always thoughtful of other people's wishes.

He thanked me for bringing his adoption into the open because it gave him an opportunity to tell her how much he loved her as his Mother and that she was the only Mother he ever knew. She must have raised him well because of the man he became.

The next morning after the trip to the cemetery, we were going to the flower shop. I knew that he was in a lot of pain. When he stopped the car at the flower shop, I reached over from the passenger's seat and put my hand on his shoulder. I said, "Come on, man. Let it out." He sobbed. For the remainder of the time we could cry together. He loved his Mother and I loved my Grandmother. It was a painful loss for

both of us, yet it was special to share our pain together.

Probably the only time that he ever lied was so that he could get a job. Grammy Englert and Dad's stepfather, Bernie Englert, were both ill. It was during the depression. He had to leave school at the age of fifteen to get a job to support the family. One of the things he missed was that he liked being on the football team at school.

Dad was hired at General Armature in Lock Haven, Pennsylvania, a company that made armatures. He did not get drafted into the military because armatures were an important part of equipment used by the Army during the war.

When he was twenty years old, he was made a supervisor of much older men. Some may have been envious, but most of the men, if not all of them, liked him. When my Mother was pregnant with me, they wanted to bet with him that I would be a girl. He did not take their bets until the morning after I was born a boy. He did it for a joke. When he offered to return their money, they all insisted that he keep it. They probably knew that he would need it.

Dad and Mother Meet

My Mother and Dad met on a blind date. My Mother, Aunt Evie and Grammy Confer were all looking out the upstairs window as this handsome young man in a blue blazer got out of his sharp looking, blue coupe convertible, curious to see who was coming with their friend for the date. They apparently hit it off well because they were married for six months short of seventy years.

The man who introduced them told Dad that if he wanted to hang out with the Confer girls, (Mother's maiden name) he better learn to dance. Once when we were talking, he told me that the way he learned to dance was to put on the radio with Big Band music and use a chair for a partner. It must have worked because there were times the other dancers would clear the floor to watch them dance.

Dad invented rear-wheel, front-wheel drive. One of the big bands was at Hecla Park, a great dance hall that brought in all the famous bands. It was at the top of a mountain. It snowed and the only way to get up the mountain over the slippery roads was to go backwards, so Dad backed the whole way up the mountain. Did I mention that he was persistent?

Not only did my parents love dancing, but they loved music. Both parents often sang in church choirs. After my younger sister, Tina, was born, when I was three and a half years old, Mother stayed home with her while Dad and I went to church. When he sang in the choir, I sat with a nice elderly woman. It was said of her that the closest she ever came to swearing was when she said "dirty snow."

There is a family story that after Tina was born, when people would come to see and make a fuss over the new baby, Dad would be with me. My picture is that we would be watching them as Dad, either kneeling or at other times sitting in a chair, would put his arms around me in front of him. He wanted me to have attention and he did not want me to be jealous of Tina.

It must have worked because Tina and I had fun when we were children and as we grew up together. I even took her to my college for a weekend and she stayed in the women's dorm with friends. She and her husband, Boots, and I are still special friends.

Dad loved cars. He took a second job selling cars. One night when he came home from that job, Mother was crying. When he asked her what was the matter, she told him, "You are never home." He stopped his job selling cars that night.

He always took good care of our cars. His last car was a Candy Apple Red Cadillac Sedan DeVille. He would pull it into the garage and put a sheet over it so it wouldn't get dusty. It is in beautiful condition and purrs. It is so much fun to drive it, and my grandchildren love it.

When I was in high school and had a date, Dad would wash the car for me to have a clean car when I went to get my girlfriend.

It was special to ride around in the car with Dad. From the time I was about eleven years old he taught me Barbershop and Big Band songs, now called songs from The Great American Songbook. His love of music was contagious and that same love has stayed with me through the years, along with jazz, which we both enjoy. I also like singing Gospel songs.

He had fun telling his friends in Kentucky about when I was a Barbershop Chorus director. I was invited to a Barbershop rehearsal. Three weeks later the vice president and the District president asked me at a sing out with another chorus if I would direct the Merrimack Valley Chorus. I said, "This is not a diagnosis, but you are crazy." (I'm a psychologist.) They asked, "Will you go to a Director Training workshop and then decide. They paid my way and I went. When I returned, they introduced me as the director.

The only music group that I had directed was when, as a minister in a parish, I was asked to start a youth choir. I had a blast and the kids loved it, too.

I decided during my first year as director that it would be fun to enter the District competition. Only thing was that I knew nothing about the rules. We went with the idea of enjoying ourselves and entertaining.

The second song we sang was, "I'm Still Havin' Fun." A line in the song was, "I may be sixty or seventy or eighty, but I'm still havin' fun!" We had members of all those

ages, including a ninety year old. They were on their feet even before we ended the song with a chorus line kick.

The District Vice-President said that “you could feel the love ripple through the audience.” The District President said, “You gave us all hope!”

The story Dad loved to tell was that our chorus came in last and we got a standing ovation.

Laugh, Dance and Sing

Dad loved a laugh. When he was eighty-eight, he took off his glasses and said, “I don’t need these anymore. I’ve seen everything.” He hadn’t learned everything because I gave him what he wanted for Christmas. Singing lessons. I arranged for a voice teacher at the local university to give him voice lessons. He loved it, at the age of eighty-eight.

He was still singing in the church choir even though my Mother had stopped a year earlier. She was two years older than him. Once I mentioned that when I introduce the song “Young at Heart” to an audience, before singing it in their honor, I talk about them. I mention that she likes younger men. She quickly responded, “No, I like a younger man.” I said, “I’m younger.” “Then that’s OK”, she answered. The people in the church enjoyed that after sixty plus years of marriage, they were still “love birds.”

After I talk about them in conversation or when introducing a song, people often comment, “You have great genes.” My response is, “Thank you, and I had great **models!**”

Dad was a compassionate man. I always took my parents to my college reunion. Reunions can be a happy, sad time. I wanted them there to enjoy the fun and for their support when I was sad or hurt. They enjoyed themselves and people at the reunion enjoyed them↓and they got to dance.

Mother and I danced, too. The year we went when she was eighty, she told me that she wasn’t going to fast dance with me anymore. In her nineties, I ask her why she had said that. She replied, “Oh, it wasn’t because I couldn’t do it. I just thought people would think, ‘What is that old lady doing out there jumping around like that.’ ”

The morning after the reunion, Dad and I were sitting in the family room. He was reading the book I authored, *How to Make Friends With Your Feelings*, before it went into print. He looked up at me and said, “Everyone should know this.” I asked, “What’s that?” He quoted, “That crying is not ‘breaking down’, it’s letting go.”

When he was retired he read the Bible and from a devotional every morning. He saw that I had tears in my eyes from reading a devotional segment that he had

given to me. He stood up and came over to my chair. I stood up and he held me while I cried.

He was always a cheerleader for me. He said that he wanted to buy the first copy of my book. At the next college reunion, after the book was printed, the college had a book signing at the outside luncheon before the football game. Dad would talk to people and then bring them to the table where I was signing books. It was embarrassing to me, yet I appreciated his love for me and what I had done.

Minister to the World

When Dad was in his twenties, he wanted to become an ordained minister. He was always involved in the church. He was superintendent of the Sunday School and held various offices in the church. During his life he was the Lay Leader, on the Board of Trustees, sang in the choir and held about every office imaginable.

He was also involved in the community. He was President of the Young Professional Men's Association. When I was five or six years old my parents and I acted in roles in the "Play Makers" drama club in Lock Haven, Pennsylvania. I was an elf called Toadkin.

When people mention how frightened or stressed they are about being in front of people, I think of how grateful I am to Dad because I had the privilege of seeing how comfortable and relaxed he was speaking or leading events. He was superintendent of the Sunday school when I was young, which meant that he was in front of audiences. At times he spoke during the worship service at church and sang in the choir and at times did solos, so it seems natural to do things like that.

Once I mentioned to a friend that a place where I was entertaining, they expected two hundred people and over five hundred showed up. My friend asked, "Weren't you afraid?" "Afraid, No. I was excited! If there were eleven people there, I would have been afraid." Thanks Dad.

Dad would have made a great minister in a church. I already mentioned how he was compassionate and respected all people. He was advised against it. He had not finished high school. He would have had to finish high school and go to college and seminary. He was married and had two children. He gave up that dream.

He did later take college classes. The president of the college twenty-four miles from where we lived in Ashland, Kentucky sponsored him, since he did not have a high school diploma. He loved learning and aced the courses. He could have taught management courses and how to treat employees.

After visiting in New England he went back to Kentucky and told his friends at the church, with his, I'm joking smile, that he had gone to Harvard. That meant he had walked through Harvard Yard.

He was a brilliant man. The District Superintendent, when I was a minister, said that he had never met a man without a college education who had a vocabulary as good as Dad's.

Because of the way he treated people at work and the way he was respected throughout the area, I have thought of him as a "Minister in the Corporate World." It is interesting that when I came to believe I could do more in greater depth as a psychologist, even though I loved the parish, Bishop James K. Matthews gave me his blessing and the Methodist Church came up with the title, "Minister in the Secular World", which for me included consulting to corporations.

Once, when we were in a doctors office, twenty-four miles from their home in Grayson, a man in the waiting room said, "You are Bob Uhler, aren't you?" Dad said, "Yes." The man said, "I have always wanted to work for you." Dad was retired by that time. Mother said that type of acknowledgment happened wherever they went. He seldom knew the people who expressed admiration for him. Maybe I need to refer to him as a "Minister to the World."

Difficult times

Life was not always easy for him. He was invited to go to General Refractories as a trainee because he knew nothing about the firebrick business. Within the shortest time of any trainee, he became superintendent of a plant. When he was sent to Kentucky, the employees had previously slacked off on their work and allegedly took home tools for their personal use. He got the men working and stopped tools from leaving the plant. Every one of the hundred and twenty-five men signed a petition to get him removed.

When the lawyer came from the Philadelphia headquarters he asked, "What the hell is going on down here, Bob?" He told him and the other executives, and added, "If you say to leave, I will leave. Otherwise, I will stay." He stayed! Shortly after that General Refractories put a million dollars into the plant. That was a lot of money in the early fifties.

As the employees came to know him and how much he cared and respected them, they supported him. I don't know how true it is, but there was a rumor that people wanted him to run for mayor of the town.

One of the main antagonists brought him a peace offering as a sign of respect, a jar of moonshine. Dad accepted the gift and I'm sure he let the man know that he appreciated it. The man became a good worker who liked Dad. I knew the man when I worked in the brickyard. Dad told me that he put his finger in the moonshine and put a drop to his tongue. He said it "was the most God awful stuff you could imagine."

I worked in the brickyard during the summers. Dad was smart. He had a supervisor over me so that he was not my boss. That worked well.

He did a lot for the community. He had Christmas parties with food and gifts, which included people in the hills who were not employees of the company. The company paid for it. He even got bridges built, which helped travel in the area and made them safer to cross.

He was given the title of Kentucky Colonel. Some people think it can be a political honor, but the governor was of the opposite political party from Dad. Once when my parents were visiting in Massachusetts. They came to a wedding that I performed for a couple at the Governor Dummer Academy. During the reception after the service, as he was talking with one of the guests, they asked if he was a Kentucky Colonel because he was from Kentucky and had on a white summer suit. He pointed to the Kentucky Colonel symbol that was on the Cady.

The superintendent of the schools in the neighboring community was being pursued by a committee for allegedly using school funds. One of the people on the committee was the office manager for Dad's plant. They had become good friends. The superintendent of schools wanted Dad to fire the office manager. Of course, being a man of courage and integrity, he refused.

Shortly after that a woman began calling Mother at home, asking if Bob was there. The school superintendent was trying to retaliate by creating a problem in their marriage by getting Mother to think that the stranger and Dad were having an affair. Fortunately, their relationship was strong and it did not disrupt the marriage. It is sad that people can be so malicious. The superintendent of schools did go to prison.

Their marriage was not always easy. My Father was intensely jealous of my Mother. Once the man of their closest couple friends dropped by the house while my Father was at work. The man had been responsible for Dad being invited to join General Refractories. Dad was so upset that Mother told him that if he didn't stop being so jealous, she would divorce him. He was never abusive, yet he probably turned inside and wasn't his usual self. I know that she never would have divorced him, but I'm sure that the threat hurt him a lot.

When I told him that his jealousy, fear of losing Mother, was a result of having been given away by his birth Mother, "abandoned" by her, and the pain of losing his loving, adoptive Father who died before he was two years old, he understood and let go of his fear of losing Mother. He relaxed and was not jealous after that.

It also helped Mother understand when I explained it to her.

The only time I saw Dad aggressively angry was when we were driving from Grammy and Pappap Confer's house. Dad always did his best to get us home on

time to get us to bed so we could get a good night's sleep before school the next day. Something was wrong with the car so it would only go about thirty or thirty-five miles per hour. Some teenagers passed us and as they did they yelled something out the window, referring to the pace Dad was driving. Dad yelled out the car window, "Go to Hell!"

It was as though lightning struck the car. Tina and I were shocked! Mother scolded, "Now Bob." Reflecting on it, I'm glad he could do it. Why not? He was human and frustrated with the car. He didn't need some smart-alecks pestering him and he didn't need Mother treating him like a child. He was always a gentleman. So what if he wasn't for a moment. People seldom hear me say anything that could be considered swearing, but when I do it certainly gets their attention.

The People He Loved Who Were Loved

Dad did not only love Mother deeply. He enjoyed connecting with all people. His love was radiant. One time in Bishop's restaurant in Lawrence, MA, he got up and walked away from our table without telling my Mother and me where he was going. This was unusual because in our family we would tell each other where we were going when we left. You feel more secure when you know where people are and do not have to guess or be concerned about each other. Less worry that way.

Dad left our table. We saw him talking and laughing with some men. There were about nine men at the table. At that time the Wang computer company suggested that visiting employees from other parts of the company go to Bishop's Near East Restaurant to eat. They had fabulous food and lots of it. My guess is that the men were travelers working at Wang.

When Dad returned to our table, he told us what happened. Bishop's had a huge baked Alaska desert loaded with strawberries. He saw it delivered to the man at the head of the table, went over to him and said, "You're not going to eat all that, are you?" They all laughed together and talked and laughed for a few minutes and he returned to our table.

A few minutes later we looked up because a wait person appeared. She said, "Those men wanted you to have this." She placed a huge baked Alaska on the table in front of Dad.

Another time they were visiting North Andover from Kentucky. A friend was graduating from Emerson College with the ceremonies at the Wang Center auditorium in Boston. After the graduation, she and my parents waited on the sidewalk while I went to get the car in the parking garage. When I returned with the car, Dad was sitting in a huge, black limousine with a black limo driver's hat.

I knew what happened and later confirmed it with Dad. He talked with the limo driver. He often would tell a person if he knew their vocation, "I would love to do

what you do.” The limo driver said, ‘Oh, sit in the limo. Here’s my hat.” Most people were charmed by Dad’s openness and his smile.

Dad, the Sportsman, The Father

He loved sports. When he was in his late teens, he and his friends would go to Williamsport, Pennsylvania, twenty miles away, to play the semi-pro hockey team and beat them. He told me that one of the men could jump twelve barrels on skates. Obviously, Dad was a good skater, too.

During the winters growing up, Lock Haven would block off five blocks of a street on a hill near our house for people to go sledding. We would all bundle up and go sled riding down the street.

Dad would take me to baseball games where he played when I was young. In my teens, he would hit the baseball to me so I could practice playing shortstop and we would throw a football to each other. We played doubles tennis together in a men’s league when I was in high school. When he went to Kentucky for a few months before we moved there, he called home and said that I had better learn to play basketball if I wanted to play sports in Kentucky. Of course, I did.

We went fishing together and with other friends. Once when I was a young teenager, he dropped a friend and me off at a trout stream on his way to work. He told me to put my line in a little swirling pool in a small stream. I did. Nothing. He put my line in where he had said and caught a trout. Once he caught a twenty inch trout.

When we were in Pennsylvania he shot deer for twelve years in a row. After we moved to Kentucky, we went rabbit hunting with a few other hunters. The limit was eight. Some of the hunters did not like rabbit meat, so they would give us theirs. Mother would cook them as you would cook Southern Fried chicken.

When I played basketball in high school at away games, we wouldn’t have time for a meal before the game. Mother would cook rabbit’s legs for me to eat on the bus. It worked out well, because then when rebounding, I jumped like a bunny! (Sorry, I couldn’t resist including that.)

In their later years they would go to football games at Penn State University and at the University of Kentucky. They were enthusiastic fans of University of Kentucky basketball.

The Grandfather and Great Grandfather

My children loved their Grandfather. Jeff, my oldest son, who has a commanding presence, at Dad’s funeral thanked the people for coming to pay their respects to his Grandfather. Then he said, “I have regretted this day since I knew that people

die.”

He went on to tell a story about an incident when my parents were visiting New England. Jeff and Dad were together when some of Jeff’s motorcycle buddies joined them. They chatted and Dad went over and threw his leg over one of the motorcycles and sat on it. Jeff said that there were a few tense moments until Dad smiled and said, “I’d sure love to have one of these.” Everyone laughed, which broke the tension. Jeff went on to speak eloquently about his Grandfather.

Matt, my younger son, went to the pulpit to speak. He has spoken several times to audiences of over a thousand people on each coast of the United States. He said a few sentences and then began to sob. He stood there until he was able to speak again. He said a few more sentences and began to sob. Again, he stood there until he was able to speak. Then he finished his comments. I don’t remember what Matt said, but I sure do remember what he did.

Each one, in their own unique way, made a powerful statement about their love for their grandfather.

He often had family around. He loved his grandchildren and great grandchildren and they loved him. His great grandchildren would enjoy hanging out with him when he was in his eighties. My sons would visit their grandparents in Kentucky, Jeff from Florida and Matt from Arizona. Matt’s son was named after his grandfather. Grayson, for the town where Dad lived, and Robert for his middle name, thus, Grayson Robert Uhler.

He had two heart surgeries where they put a pig valve in his heart. When he had the first one, my niece who was young at the time, asked if he would squeal like a pig.

Because I am a minister, I was allowed in post-op after the operation. It was difficult watching him recover, not knowing whether he would live or die. It was good that I was there because the nurse came into the room and called him, Joseph. He didn’t respond. Of course not. He went by “Bob.” Formally, he signed his name, J. Robert Uhler but on the hospital papers he put his full name which was Joseph Robert Uhler. Joe or Joseph was never familiar to him, so they could have easily misinterpreted his non-responsiveness.

I learned a lesson. People call me “Bob” or “Robert” when they see J. Robert Uhler II. I always put “Jay” after J. Robert Uhler II, in case I am in a similar situation.

Even though we have the same given name, my parents and later I made sure that each of us had our own identity. Dad was Bob, I am Jay and my son is called Jeff, short for Joseph.

Christmas Joy

When Tina and I were young, we would fall asleep excited for Santa Clause to arrive. When we awoke in the morning, the room with the Christmas tree sparkled. Not only was the tree gleefully bright with radiant decorations and lights, but there was a whole village under the tree with snow, houses with colored lights, people sharing the joy, skiers on the white cotton slopes, skaters on the mirror pond, a train running around and through the town—it was spectacular.

All that would majestically appear because Dad would create it through the night while we slept.

Grammy Englert, Aunt May (Dad's aunt), Grammy and Pappap Confer would all join us for presents in the morning and the remainder of Christmas day. Christmas was a wonderful multi-generational family event.

When Dad retired he took the whole glorious city to the church so all the people there could enjoy the glow of a beautiful, peaceful city at Christmas time as a way to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

The Beautiful Lake

When Dad was in the hospital for surgery to replace the pig valve that was wearing out, he had an experience which was significant. He said that during surgery, he had a vision. He went to a beautiful lake. He couldn't tell if it was Jesus or St. Peter in the middle, but it was so peaceful that he didn't want to come back.

Years later, in his late eighties, he told people about the experience and said, "I'm not afraid to die." He knew what was ahead of him when he would die. It was a wonderful message to share with other people, most of whom were younger than he was. I certainly appreciated hearing it.

After the surgery, I noticed that often men who came into his room for some reason would hang around longer than is typical and talk. I realized that they wanted to be in the loving energy between a Father and son.

When Hospice was brought in by a doctor, the Hospice assistant chaplain, as I walked him to the door to leave, mentioned how fortunate I was to have the kind of loving relationship that existed between my Father and me. He wished that he had that kind of relationship with his Father.

I went to Kentucky for Mother's ninety-first birthday. Dad had an excruciating pain in his leg related to the Sciatic nerve. Within fifteen minutes, I released it and it did not return.

Mother looked exhausted from taking care of Dad. I decided to stay with them to help out. My Sister and Mother were afraid that if I left to go to North Andover for three days to get some things in order, that Dad would die. He did not.

When I returned, we had a wonderful time together. When he and Mother got married, she got up at six o'clock in the morning to get his breakfast before he went to work. After a few weeks he told her to stay in bed, because he didn't like eating breakfast.

After he retired he could eat breakfast later in the morning. When I was there, I would get his breakfast, so I would ask him how many eggs he wanted. He would often answer, seven or eight. Then he would have one or two. Even when he was sick, he loved to joke.

Once, when my son Matt was on one extension at my house and I was on another one, I just sat back and listened, laughing, as Dad and Matt went back and forth with one liners.

Dad had a strange episode while I was in Kentucky and was taken to the hospital. The doctor decided to have hospice come in. Dad's cardiologist said that he didn't think that Dad had a heart attack, however a Hospice worker came to the hospital to talk to our family. I asked my parents and sister in front of the woman from Hospice if I could be involved with Dad's medication. My parents and sister said that I could have a say in whatever medication Dad was on.

When Hospice came in they did their best to convince my Mother and Sister that Dad was about to die. I wasn't convinced. He lived for ten more months. He was having a difficult time breathing. He was so strong that he would run from one end of the house to the other to get to an air conditioner so he could breathe.

I knew that the trouble breathing was caused by medication. The Hospice nurse and a doctor fought against me being involved in medication and getting Dad off the medication that was causing breathing problems.

Finally, after complaining enough, my Mother suggested, "You and the doctor (Dad's cardiologist) get along well. Why don't you call him?" I did. He asked, "How much is he on?" I told him. He said to give him half of one and he's done. He trusted me that I would be on top of the situation if a problem arose.

Four days later, Dad asked to run some errands with me. I always backed the car on the front lawn so he could get in it without going down the stairs to the garage. We did the errands and as we approached the house he said for me to go to the garage on the lower level. I, of course, did.

He got out of the car and walked up fourteen steps from the room on the garage level to the kitchen. I asked, "How are you feeling?" He answered, "Fine." He was breathing evenly with no difficulty.

While I was in Kentucky, I called my Mother's doctor to ask her to lower Mother's blood pressure medication because Mother's BP was too low. She did immediately.

Dad told me that he had previously asked that doctor about a suggestion I had made to him about something related to his health. She had told him, "If Jay suggested it, do it."

I was surprised that he asked her, but I don't think he was questioning me, because he always was open to my suggestions and my help with his health. I think that he knew her well and was curious about what she would say. I guess I get my huge curiosity from him. Before his surgeries and later when he was sick, he loved having me send healing energy into his body through my hands and to give him massages.

On his ninetieth birthday, I called the Barbershop Chorus twenty-four miles away in Ashland, Kentucky to request that a quartet come to sing to Dad on his birthday. We used to go to Ashland to attend their rehearsals when I would visit Kentucky, so I knew the director. He said, I will bring as many men as are available. I asked how much they would charge. "For your Father, nothing."

When they arrived, nine or ten men piled out of the van to sing to Dad. There were some family members present. It was especially nice that the Sister, they used to be called Nuns, from the Roman Catholic Church was there to bring Dad a birthday present. The Methodist Minister was also there. His Father-in-law sang in the Ashland Chorus. It was a wonderful time.

The next morning Dad asked me if they were offended because he cried while they were singing. I told him that not only were they not offended. They were pleased.

He was always sensitive to others feelings and wanted them to know that he appreciated them for being their and bringing music that he loved, not offend them.

Last Days

It was a privilege to be with him for those ten months hanging our together, and then with him in a Hospice Care unit for those four days as he was dying. My sister, Tina, thoughtfully arranged for me to stay in his room because she knew I would want to be with him.

I did not know how many men in the church loved him, perhaps saw him as a Father figure. One of the men and I stood and hugged each other and cried on each others shoulder the night before he died.

Later, Dad came awake for a few minutes. He tried to tell me something, but he was so weak that I couldn't understand him. He tried again and then went to sleep. Because he had told me often, I can only speculate that he wanted to tell me that he loved me and how much he appreciated me being there in Kentucky to care for him. Or Maybe he was telling me, "I'm going to that beautiful lake."

Before going to sleep I asked the nurse to be aware of him for me. She came in

during the early morning to wake me and tell me that my Father was dying. I went to his bedside and then he died. After staying with him for a few minutes, I got my belongings together to go tell my Mother and Sister that he had died.

Before I left, I put my hand on his chest over his heart. It was surprising that he felt hard as concrete. It was clear that this warm, loving man had left his body to go to that beautiful lake where he had been before, to meet St. Peter or Jesus or both.

it was July 6th that he was free. In late September, I always rode my bicycle for the Rodman Ride For Kids Fundraiser. The money raised goes to agencies that serve poor and minority youth at risk of getting into trouble. Five miles into that ride it occurred to me, so I said, "Come on, Dad, we're going to ride this one together!"

How do you end a story of the life of your Hero as you sob, tears pouring down your cheeks. I guess by saying, "Thank you for being my Dad. I love you!"

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