

Edward Eugene Bennett
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Dad was an extraordinary person. Sometimes a character bigger than life. Sometimes (rarely) a quiet and introspective person. People that know him will never forget him. I would like to share a few stories about Dad, and the traits exhibited by these stories, that made him who he was and shaped my life and others who knew him forever.

FAITH & FAMILY– A Catholic Upbringing

Dad came from a very Catholic Polish family, one anchored by his grandmother Josephine, mother of Dad's mom, Sophie. It was a good time to have a strong faith and a large close family because only six months after Dad was born, the country had officially entered the Great Depression. One thing was always clear in hearing Dad talk about these times: although they had so little, as a kid he didn't really feel he was deprived. His Dad made a checkerboard by drawing on a newspaper. His Mom butchered a pig ever few months and used nearly every part of it, including pickled pig knuckles (to which he introduced me at the ripe age of 3), and in the last year of Prohibition (he was just 4), his Dad and uncles had him pulling a wagon of moonshine from the farm to the speakeasy down the road. The special family gatherings, with fattened geese from the moonshine mash, fresh tomatoes, herring from the Saginaw Bay, pierogi, gawompki, and kielbasa always sounded to me like a king's feast. There is no doubt these hardship years built a lot of Dad's character (he was also an altar boy at St. Andrews, where he went to school) and the stories about these times made a big impact on me. "Happiness", he said, "was not found in the number of things we had but how we shared the few things we had with family and friends". There is a lesson here.

YOUTH & COURAGE – Semper Fidelis

Almost every adult man goes through that "I am invincible" superman type mode in their life. For Dad, it must've kicked in a couple years early. At just over 15, Dad took his deceased brother's birth certificate and with his uncle's signature, and much to Sophie's and Tony's (his parents) demise, he enlisted in the Marine Corps. He was going to fight for his country, and fight he did. He found himself on the island of Saipan shortly after the initial invasion. He talked little about this time, only saying he experienced things that he would never let his family see nor experience. After this first tour, he was called back for the Korean conflict in 1950. During this time he

remain stateside at Camp Lejeune as a trainer, but until we discovered a letter to his Mom, Dad and Sister (Suzie) in his box of photos, little did we know how close we came to losing Dad due to a [major accident at the base](#) when two mortar shells fell short and into his platoon. Eight of his friends were killed. He never discussed this incident with anyone of us (including Mom).

LOVE & OPTIMISM– Big Guy Hugs

Dad met Mom on a double date, where they were actually dating the other person. It was obvious the two were meant to be. Shortly after they met, they married (he played accordion at Mom's & his reception) and two years later I popped into the scene. We were living in Detroit, and from what I remember we had a two-bedroom apartment with a small living room and kitchen. But what I really remember is this "big guy", my Dad, who always whistled on his way out the door as he put on his hat, the kind real men wore in those days, looking like a million bucks, and giving me the biggest hugs in the world. Somehow, all the other details of that small apartment seem to escape my memory. The feelings of those "the big guy hugs", with all the optimism radiating from the strong, positive sound of his whistling, remain with me as if it happened today.

RESPONSIBILITY & LEADERSHIP – Lawn Duty

There were plenty of things I remember about Dad and our years in Farmington, Michigan...a suburb outside of Detroit. One of my earliest recollections was how I was trained early on to take care of lawn duty. Dad went out and got this 5HP Montgomery Ward riding lawn mower. I must've been all of eight years old. No matter...Dad was already working on his "work delegation" skills. He was the "leader"...Gordie and I were "worker bees". So he sat me on it, showed me how to shift, use the brake and the throttle and how to engage and disengage the mowing deck. We must've gone over it a hundred times. I was a bit nervous about the entire thing, but he reassured me that it would be fine. He then sat me on it alone, went over to the patio, popped the top on his beer, and gave me the go ahead. I promptly shifted the mower in high gear, dropped the deck and ran the mower right threw the rose garden. Chewed up every darn one of those prized beauties. Gordie sat on the fence with a bewildered look like 'oh crap, are you gonna get it.' But all that happened is Dad once again assumed lawn duties for that remainder of that season, still taking the time to show me how it was done. I think that was the last season he ever cut the

lawn...must've been about 1963. He also moved the rose garden out of my path and into the fenced patio.

GUIDANCE & UNDERSTANDING – Fork in the Road

There are defining moments in any kid's life when, looking back, you definitely see a fork in the road. For several of my childhood years I was hanging around a kid across the street, Michael Furton, who not only was a couple of years older than I, but on the fast track to the big house. You know the kid...growing out his mustache in elementary school. Michael was teaching me all the tools of the trade, including how to wear a big jacket into Arnold's drug store and load it with all the candy, magazines and toys you could fit into the pockets, sleeves and hood. WOW! This is great. So great, in fact, I gotta show my younger brother how this gig works (note to self...don't show your younger sibling everything....). So we go on a "shopping spree", get home, and promptly Gordie and I get into one of those perpetual young sibling squabbles. Unfortunately, before I have time to catch his fast little butt (yes, he once was faster and skinnier than I), he drags my complete loot cache out in front of Mom, Dad, Grandma and Grandpa saying "Look what Brad stole from Arnold's!". Well of course, I did a Bill Clinton....deny, deny, deny....and it worked as well for me as it did for Bill. The evidence was too convincing. I was impeached as "good son" in a blink of an eye. What took place next, however, is the really the heart of this story about Dad. I was prepared for one real whoopin'. You know, a back side application of that one somewhat tattered leather belt hanging in the closet for "special occasions". But no...it wasn't happening. Dad simply asked me to put all the stuff I had acquired in a bag and follow him across the street to the Furtons. What happened in a matter of a few minutes changed my life forever. We were met at the door by Mr. Wally Furton, Michael's dad. Dad explained to Wally about the stealing from Arnold's and wanted to ensure that we both be punished equally for it. Instead of agreeing, Wally called Michael to the front door, where Michael denied all of it. And his dad simply said "Ed, sorry, but I think this is a problem between you and your son." I was dumbfounded. And that was that. Wally shut the door, Dad drove me down to Arnold's drug store where I confessed to it all, and ended up cleaning shelves for the next two weekends (not for pay, just for payback). Dad never laid a hand on me. He also told me he knew Michael was as guilty as I, but that really had no bearing on my situation. "In your life you are going to come across people like Michael and Mr. Furton all the time. Make your own decisions....make the decisions that you know are

right in your heart.” I never hung around Michael Furton again. As I said, it was a life changing incident. One that Dad handled with perfect parental grace. Sidenote: I, however, did not handle it with the same deal of understanding and promptly gave Gordie the royal pounding he so rightfully deserved the next time we were left alone....hey, it was only fair that I “share” such a life changing moment. Second sidenote: as I look around the room I have a certain feeling that there are going to be a few more “fork-in-the-road” moments in the Bennett family. I just hope I can exhibit the kind of Guidance & Understanding as Dad showed me.

HUMILITY – Hitting the Mark

Sometimes no matter how funny, ironic, or sad you just have to bite your tongue. This one summer day out on Saginaw Bay was one such moment. I remember us fishing, not doing all that well that day (Dad, Gordie and I), and the wind was picking up. With whitecaps building, I hauled up anchor, Gordie started the boat, put in in gear and headed for the marina...about 3 miles away. Dad was nursing his beer. The ride back was getting rougher, the boat was pounding more and more...and then the unthinkable happened. Dad’s beer dropped off of the console and went everywhere. “G...D...It. Who’s driving this thing?! Get out of there. I will handle this. Crap, if you want something done right, you gotta do it yourself. Watch how I do this.”. So Dad takes the wheel, and Gordie and I huddle up out on the front deck as the wave splash even more, the boat pounds more, but we are getting closer to our destination. Directly. Like dead on directly. Now to reach our destination, however, which is the dock, there is one small catch....you first need to direct the boat into the marina channel. And the channel is marked by huge 8’ x 8’ fluorescent orange triangular channel markers, anchored in the muck with some sort of steel structure. As a normal course, a captain makes a wide sweeping turn to go between these markers. But not this day. We are going to see how it’s “done”. And boy did we. [long pause] Dad didn’t quite “make the turn, and clipped off that big orange trophy going about 30 knots. It was a clean snap. Gordie even caught it, holding it up like a trophy as we entered the marina. People on shore looked in disbelief. And Dad didn’t blink an eye and said: “Now THAT is how you drive a boat. Get me another beer.”. Not a word was spoken around our cottage about our catch that day...nor do I believe the story had been told around our household until the other day. Sometimes you just have to suck it up.

GUTS – We’re Going to Disney World!

Ordinary people at the age of 55, having an executive job with a major corporation, don't cash it all in and assume the risk of starting their own business. But Dad was extraordinary. He recognized a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to start something that would not only be a challenge once again, but also might be the start of something that might once again bring his kids all together. Truly, it wasn't the money. It was bringing the family together that Dad really wanted. So Dad, Mom and Robin packed their belongings and headed to the land of Disney World to start Orlando Hose & Fittings. Most people come to Orlando to bring their families together for a week or two. Dad did it to bring us together forever. And risked it all to do it. He was successful...in all ways imaginable.

FAITH & PEACE – Transition

Dad broke his leg in August, 2006 and during this recovery time in the hospital it was apparent he was going through a transition. His mortality had paid him a visit...as well as a priest from a local Catholic church, Father Paul. During these meetings with Father Paul, and more than any of us kids had known, Dad had renewed his faith and made his peace. It was a process that continued during the next two years of his life. Dad had returned to the foundation so deeply held by his grandmother and mother, Josephine and Sophie, and supported by our Mom, Evelyn, and in doing so left this world ready for his next journey. In many ways, it seems much like the journey he began 79 years ago.

Dad was an amazing person. Full of Faith & Courage. Love & Optimism. Responsibility & Leadership. Guidance & Understanding. Guts. And even a sprinkling of Humility. He had his shortcomings too, but who on this God given Earth doesn't? He lived his life as he wanted, while still very much caring for the people around him. So although this is a very sad day, we should all take to heart these examples of a life that was very well lived. That's the only way Dad would want it.