

My dad's superpower was love. Others may have seen it differently, but love was at the root of everything that distinguished him. First and foremost he loved his family. I remember many years ago his winning a snapshot camera in a giveaway at Taylor's Drug Store. Never mind that he didn't take more than a dozen photos in his life, he lamented the fact he'd expended his luck on such a paltry prize. "Why couldn't it have been the lottery?" he wanted to know. Later that day he confided to me his surprise at winning anything at all. "I thought I'd used up all my luck the day your mom agreed to marry me." Rarely apart from her for seventy years, he loved her with great abandon and unselfconscious tenderness. "She's so much smarter than I am," he'd say, and delighted in her accomplishments and honors as if they were his own.

Dad loved his children. And their partners. And his grandchildren. And their partners. And any baby, of anyone's, at any time. There was never a question about whose side he was on. I remember his (and Mom's) harsh and challenging address to the school board when my sister Kris was denied enrollment in wood shop class because, they said, "home economics is the place for girls." As you might guess, Kris was the first of many young women to learn woodcraft at Granville High School. His was an elemental, practical love. When I brought my future bride home for the first time it was an hour before a scheduled dinner party. "Hello," Dad said to her, "would you mind vacuuming these two rooms?" Spouses, partners, friends, and strays were welcomed into the house without ceremony or reservation, and were expected to help with cooking, serving, hosting, and chores. Visitors (and potential mates) who weren't comfortable with that never lasted long.

Dad loved teaching, and knew its power and value. I remember his coming to the dinner table enraged when the Faculty Senate failed to support his proposal that all first year students have a common writing course, to best prepare them for their subsequent study and careers. Eventually the course became a reality, with Denison among the first to adopt what's now a nearly universal practice. Even though those writing courses were frequently relegated to junior faculty, he taught them with enthusiasm and joy, every semester, for the rest of his tenure at the college. Nor was his teaching constrained by the classroom. I remember him, sitting with groups of students around our dinner table, strategizing how to support the Black Student Union during the campus unrest of the early 1970s. And I remember, as do many of his friends, the decades he spent introducing them and his students to the history of London and the spectacle of London theater on semi-annual trips across the Atlantic.

Dad loved language and delighted in the written word. Shakespeare was among his favorites, and his granddaughter Sarah was happy at family gatherings, to recite the dialogue and sonnets she memorized at his urging. And though he stood squarely behind the principal who suspended me from school when I made a derogatory comment to a teacher about her class, he rounded instantly on the same principal when I was assigned to complete an essay by way of atonement. “Writing as a punishment? Not in my house, sir!” He loved writing for his own enjoyment, and because of that his children and grandchildren do, too. The pleasure and success I’ve had as a writer can be traced back to his gentle but relentless warnings about passive voice, self-indulgence, and the “irresponsible use of language.” Oh, and don’t forget the nights my siblings and I sat on the stairs listening to people like Eudora Welty, Kurt Vonnegut, and Joseph Heller as they sat in our living room reading from their work and talking about the writer’s craft.

Dad loved a bargain. Nothing was better than having lunch with mom for \$2 at Taco Bell—each of them with a tostada and a free senior citizen drink. As the first college graduate from a blue collar family of modest means, he knew the value of thrift, budgeting, and sacrifice. Dad was practical and fair, and he expected his children to be independent and self-reliant. My own kids sometimes roll their eyes at my penny pinching, but their solid personal finances can be directly traced the lessons and expectations of my own upbringing. Yes, we went camping, and fishing, and to drive-in movies. But we spent more than our fair share of time working at home, which included remodeling projects, on which we learned carpentry, plumbing, electrical wiring, and which walls could be removed without collapsing the house. Whether it was \$100 for a car repair in the early days of figuring out how to stretch a dollar or help with a thorny professional problem decades later, we all counted on and received his best effort without criticism, judgement, or haste. Now all of us are hovering around retirement and, as he wished and planned for forty years ago, we all share a home and each others’ lives again, just as we did growing up on the hill, across the street from Denison’s campus.

Dad loved gardens. Our Burg St. house had no yard, let alone garden, so we spent two years at forced labor terraforming the steep, weedy, rocky hillside behind it into paths and flowerbeds so he could plant and entertain. He was always looking for something new and interesting to put in the ground. I can’t tell you how many times he said, “You know, I think I’ll stop by that house and share a few of those when those folks are asleep tonight.” His real garden, though, was people. He tended them with care and attention. They’re sitting around you today, and you’ll find plenty more of them from London to L.A. and Torremolinos to Tampa. I can’t imagine a better legacy than ninety years spent pushing ripples of love out across the world. I’m going to keep right on loving on his behalf. I hope, as he would, that you will too.