

In Memory of My Father

Kimberlyn Woodard



As I sit to write a tribute to my dad, I find it very difficult to do because words don't seem to express my feelings completely. Words just don't come together well enough to express the feelings I have for the great life he led, as well as his senseless death. How am I supposed to move forward with my life? My heart is broken.

My mind races with questions: "How could this have happened? How can this be part of my life story? How can someone so full of life be gone forever? How can my dad, who dedicated his life to seeking truth and making the world a better place, be gone?" I can't get over the fact that life is so unfair. Bad things do happen to good people. My dad lived such an honest and full life. He had accomplished so much and had so much more to offer to the world. As many have said to me, his death is a tragic loss to the family as well as the world.

When I sit quietly in my parents' home, there are remembrances of my dad all around me. The phone rings and the answering machine announcement, which I always told him was too long, goes off. His voice telling every single caller that they can ". . . leave a message of any length"; this was so important for him to convey. The family portrait I gave to my mom for Mother's Day sits on the mantle. It was a whimsical photo we took in casual clothing just a few years ago, one of the only family portraits in which my dad wears his glasses and smiles his usual smile. The enormous new flat-screen, high-definition TV that my mom had just bought for him looms at the front of the living room. It's hard to watch anything on it without having him there to point out the amazing picture quality and terrific sound. The cat quietly walks across the floor and I'm reminded of how when I'd call my parents to video chat so they could see their first grandbaby, my dad insisted he put the cat on the desk so I could see his baby. I walk into the kitchen and can imagine my dad grabbing some lunchmeats from the refrigerator, making yummy sounds as he eats and asking me if I wanted some too, seeming surprised when I said no. In the hall closet I find the dark, wide-brimmed cowboy hat my dad wore everywhere. It was always easy for me to spot him at the Manchester airport as he rushed to meet us, Dunkin' Donuts coffee in hand, when my husband and I would visit from Seattle.

It is too painful to imagine what our lives are now going to be like without him at the Thanksgiving table, with an empty seat in our family room as we open Channukah gifts,

no Father's Day or birthday gifts to buy, no running from his home office to the post office daily, no one to sit at the kitchen table with us explaining the marvels of what is "mind boggling" in the field of new energy. It's hard to imagine how the person to whom I would seek protection from as a child will not be there to protect me anymore. The father who, when I was a child, would poke fun at me because I'd hide under the table during my temper-tantrums shouting, "Don't look at me!" The person who would playfully gallop with me around the house and fling me onto the bed. He was so proud of me when I became a teacher like his mother. He would often stare at me across the table, almost in amazement that he and my mom had created such a successful, independent woman. I'm so deeply saddened that he will not see me continue to grow in my life as a mother. There were so many things I planned on sharing with him.

My dad was a very sentimental person. Walking into either of his offices, at work or home, you might think he needed to do some spring cleaning. But take a closer look and you see the things he cherished. An E.T. doll he'd bought me and my brother when the movie first came out, encased in glass, with Steven Spielberg's autograph. He loved to tell the story of how he was visiting the SETI dish and Steven Spielberg was there. As the famous director was leaving, swarmed by reporters and fans, my dad stuck out the E.T. doll hoping desperately for an autograph, exclaiming, "Mr. Spielberg, please sign this!" Out of the crowd Mr. Spielberg chose my dad's doll and signed it. It was on the news that night, too! It was almost childlike, the way my dad told this story with such excitement so many times. He has a letter he wrote to Neil Armstrong and the response he got back, framed in glass after my brother was born. He loved the space program and had so much admiration for the first man to land on the moon, so much so that he gave my brother the middle name "Armstrong."



Kim, Gene, Ethan, and Joanne

The first donation he ever got upon beginning the New Energy Foundation, along with a best-wishes note from the friend who wanted to be the first to contribute, is framed on his

office wall. As I look around his home office, there's a wonderful picture, that I also have in my own home, of me hugging my brother one year at Stellafane, a place where our family would go every year when Ethan and I were just kids, so that my dad could talk to people about telescopes and astronomy. When he and my mom came to visit this past February to meet their first grandchild, Matthew was one week old. My dad had purchased a *New York Times* the day after his birth, February 28. He bought a special plastic envelope while we shopped at a stamp store and later gave this to me along with the newspaper, almost embarrassed because he thought I'd think he was such a silly old sap. He wanted Matthew to be able to look back and see what was going on in the world the day he entered it. When my parents helped

me brave the mall with a brand new baby, my dad trailed behind my mom and me as we picked out new baby-boy outfits. Upon meeting up with us a bit later, he radiated with excitement at his amazing find. He was able to buy Matthew his first model car. . .and it was on sale!

He loved his childhood home in Norwich. It's heart-breaking to think how safe he felt in that home, the place where his life began, but also ended. He had so many memories there. It's why he never sold it despite his parents moving some twenty years earlier and the family pleading with him to let go of it. The state had slowly been taking the land to build a wider road as the area grew and grew. The next step was to take the entire house. He was so desperate not to let the state take his home that he was looking into having the house physically moved to another location. What I once regarded as clutter in my dad's offices now reminds me of how important it was for him to document special times in his life with some sort of remembrance.

My dad brought liveliness and playfulness to our family. He had such a strong presence in our home. His energy and excitement filled the place. Now our home is quiet. There's an emptiness that cannot be filled by anyone else. Whenever we'd have get-togethers, my dad was the life of the party and always knew how to relax everyone. . .and, of course, eventually a conversation about cold fusion or other new energies would arise, sometimes even demonstrations, and the energy level would go even higher! He was a jokester. One of his favorite sayings was, "Beam me up, Scotty. There's no intelligent life here on Earth." He was fun to be around. He had a magnetic personality. His black beard and moustache and sometimes stern-looking expression might have intimidated others, but he was a sensitive, tender human being with an extraordinarily generous heart.

My dad felt extremely bonded to all of his family. He was



Gene, Joanne, Kim, Patrick, and Susan and Lynn Woodard at Kim's wedding in December 1998.

very interested in genealogy and was always seeking out information about our family tree. He was an only child and a devoted son to his parents. When his parents could no longer take care of themselves, he took care of them without hesitation. When my grandpa passed away a little over a year ago, my dad brought his mom to an apartment right next to his office so he could see her every day, buy groceries she needed, and take her to the doctor. He loved his parents very much and he was the apple of their eye.

My dad loved to learn. This is obvious from his library, which had to overflow into our basement. He had books of all sorts, but found particular interest in things that could not be entirely explained. He was open-minded, using books to obtain knowledge about what he did not understand so he could form his own opinions. He thrived on discussions about these things. In his home office, there is a chair he'd read in and, next to it, a stack of books he was in the process of reading before his death—he was juggling about ten books simultaneously. There weren't enough hours in the day for the amount of reading my dad wanted to do! Stacks of magazines he'd never want to throw away are assembled throughout the room. He just could not get enough information and knowledge. They say the best gift you can give someone else is one you'd want for yourself. Well, every Channukah there were bound to be, among the wrapped-up presents, at least three books for me from my dad. He inscribed every book he gave me—books about September 11, Judaism, U.S. history, cats. . .you name it! I now look at these books, as they sit on my bookshelf, with a new sentimentality.

My dad was a religious man and was proud of his Jewish heritage. As a young girl, I did not like to go to temple, but went begrudgingly to Shabbat and high-holiday services, as well as Hebrew school several times a week. Despite my resistance to going to temple, I do have fond childhood memories of being at temple with my dad. During services he'd wear his tallit and I'd sit by him, playing with the tzitzit as if it was long hair or spaghetti slipping through my fingers. He'd be chanting a prayer along with the congregation and look over at me, raise his eyebrows and smile as if to say, "Don't worry. The service will be over soon. . .It's not so bad after all, is it?" I'd often rest my head on his arm and occasionally drift off to sleep during the rabbi's sermons. To get my brother and me to go to Sunday school, my dad would coax us with a promised trip to Fiske's, a local candy store. We'd always have a Passover seder in our home. My dad would hide the affikomen and I'd be afraid when he'd open the door for Elijah. Years later, I understand how my dad felt about raising his children Jewish because I'll be raising my own children Jewish. I know he was pleased when my husband and I had decided to do so (we are an interfaith couple). When he visited recently, we had some of our Jewish friends over to welcome our baby boy into the Jewish community. I was so glad to show my dad that, despite all



Gene, Joanne, grandson Matthew, and Kim in February 2004.



The happy grandparents take Matthew for a walk, February 2004.



Gene and Joanne.

my complaining over the years about going to temple, I had found friends here that would help me to celebrate our religion in a way that was special and that he was right about the importance of being devoted to Judaism's teachings.

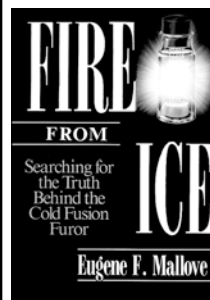
Since my father's death, I find myself still in disbelief. He was so full of life. I had just talked with him in a video chat the Monday before his death to show both my parents how much the baby had grown. I keep expecting him to answer the phone with his jovial, "Oh hello, Kim!" or see him walk around the corner with his cowboy hat, rushing off to do errands of some sort, asking me if I needed anything while he was out. My heart aches because I know these things won't happen, but my mind tries to help me cope by keeping these images alive. I'm reading book after book to help ease my pain. I'm desperate to find peace or anything that will allow me to keep on living despite his absence. I gravitate toward books that keep me believing he is in a better place. I like to think he is watching over me, especially when various things during the day remind me of him, like a Willie Nelson song on the radio, a funny joke, or a book I find that he'd like.

I know that if my dad is watching over me, he would wish many things for me in the future. He'd wish for me to keep in close contact with our family no matter how far away they might be. He'd want me to be proud of being a Jew—raise my children to have a bar/batmiztvah and pass on the holiday traditions he and my mom created when I was growing up. He'd want me to follow my dreams and not let anything or anyone stand in my way. He'd want me to take care of our blessing—baby Matthew—and any other children we are lucky enough to have in the future. He'd hope that

someday the home I'd live in and the car I'd drive would be powered by clean, cheap, renewable energy; that I'd live in a more peaceful world that didn't rely on oil as its primary energy source. He'd want me to be happy, no matter what that meant, and he'd want me to keep on living as if every day was my last. This is how he lived his life.

I've always been told that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Like my dad, I have always enjoyed writing. We both enjoyed a good laugh. People say I have his nose and his eyes. Most recently a friend of mine told me that she saw a lot of my dad in me. She told me she sees his liveliness and zest for life in me. Hearing this brought tears to my eyes, but I can't think of a more meaningful compliment than to be told that my dad lives on in me.

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