



Roger M. Knisley

July 1, 1928 - February 3, 2017

What is life? It is the flash of a firefly in the night. It is the little shadow which runs across the grass and loses itself in the sunset. Crowfoot, Native American

On February 3rd on a starry morning, crystal against deep, cold black, I look out over a frozen bay. Holding the phone and speaking with my sister in the ER, we make the surreal decision to let our father go. At 4:30 am, stroking his hand, she holds the phone and we listen together as all life support is turned off. Then there is only silence, into which the doctor in the ER gets back on the phone and confirms Dad's death.

When I start writing this I am in a plane heading home to Dad. Before I have my computer in hand, the stories start pouring into my mind, irrepressible as the man. We all have special and particular memories of him, but these are mine. When I think of Dad, I think of this quote by the publisher Cerf Bennett I often wanted to be bolder than I was, and as I've gotten older ... I've been able to be much more outrageous, really.

Dad was smart, athletic and shrewd, but the real tipping point was that he tried harder. In high school, at a height of 5'6", Dad, because he could jump higher than anybody else, was center on his varsity basketball team. Besides being a high scorer and one of the best foul shooters, he always guarded the opponent's top scorer, which often resulted in his fouling out - a bit of a problem since there were only 8 guys on the team. In his senior year, this little Ohio team went to States and won handily. Then they all rode back like a band of refugees in the big old American car of fan JB Smith – Dad and another squeezed into the trunk. To get into the marines, Dad had to overcome a major obstacle. He didn't weigh enough. A recruiter counseled him to eat two bananas, a large bowl of oatmeal, drink a pitcher of water, and hold it... It worked. The first morning he fell out for roll call the drill instructor looked at a hat resting on a pair of spectacles, and a uniform reaching well beyond it's arms and legs. He said What the hell do we have here ? OK four eyes, fall out. And you better come back tomorrow looking like a soldier. That night dad sewed some adjustments. Boot camp bulked him up by 40 lbs, he earned the rank of sergeant, was excused from many gruesome practice runs because he was a crack typist, regularly babysat for the commander and was his designated chauffeur when one was needed to pick up his Powers model wife.

Dad was indulgent. I remember sitting in a church pew one Sunday morning with my friend Kit, whose mother, as mine, spent the service in the choir loft. Dad was the designated chaperon for many of us kids. Mid-service, a white mouse crawled out of my friend's pocket and onto the program between us where we were playing hangman. We convulsed in what we assumed to be soundless giggles, then gently stuffed the beloved pet back into our pockets.

Years later I asked Dad if he knew that we once brought a mouse to church, and if he did why he didn't do anything. He shrugged and said, What was I going to do?

Dad was immoderate and fearless when faced with an obstacle. He loved a smooth manicured green lawn. One day he decided that the ground-dwelling rodents making holes in his yard had to go. As my sister recalled, she is outside helping Dad with the yard work. He sweetly asks her to stay on the patio. He then empties a full 5-gallon gas can and pours a healthy glug into each available hole. Our rectangular lawn was serenely long and abutted six other properties. He then headed back to the patio to join my sister, but not before tossing a lit match into the nearest hole. For a few spectacular minutes the neighborhood exploded, flames and black smoke shot from the holes and lifted the sod in ripples. Dad was delighted. Then, our mother ran out with me in her arms. They hadn't discussed this lawn improvement project. The expressions of our mother and our neighbor Dr. Sheese, whose lunch on the breezeway had been interrupted by this, contradicted Dad's view that this had been an otherwise spectacularly satisfying job. Our neighbor's patio was cracked in half but we don't recall seeing those pesky rodents again for quite a few summers.

Dad was open-minded. At my mothers house just a few miles away from his childhood home, where he spent considerable time, my grandmother Clara Theobald might be hosting a traveling Baptist choir (all African Americans) and hoping for a hootenanny where she could play her ukulele and belt out gospel songs in a passionately shaking alto. At Dad's house his grandfather stored his KKK robe in the attic. Despite their contrary views, and the fact that Dad was not in agreement with his grandfather, he was devoted to both of them.

And finally, there was dad's humor. During Dad's last evening in the ER he startled the staff into a smile. Yvonne (Lanese) Fritz, who had been holding his hand keeping it warm in the hours before my sister arrived, waited in the trauma room while he was wheeled away for some tests. When he's rolled back in, he raised his fist in triumph and said to Yvonne It's a girl!

Dad is predeceased by his wife Nevelyn, his sister Juanita Dorn, his brothers, Richard and Marion, and his parents Alice and Elza "Dave" Knisley. He is survived by his daughters Valerie and Dee, and their husbands Jean-Marc Braem and John Ruger, his brother Jack Knisley and his wife Ann, along with a large extended family, all of you, and the legacy of hope, humor, reverence and irreverence, high jinx and optimism that if we let it, will live on in each of us.

As Rumi 13th century Muslim poet says Tis only the semblance of death – in reality it is a migration.

A Memorial Service will be held on Saturday, February 11, 2017 at 11AM at Annville United Methodist Church, 1 North College Avenue, Annville, PA 17003. There will be a time of visitation one hour prior to the service. A luncheon in the church basement will follow the service, all are welcome to attend. In lieu of flowers, you may send a donation to the United Methodist Church.

Tribute Wall

LH

“ Although we moved from Annville 20 years ago Roger and Nevelyn have always had a place in our memories. I did work for Roger and he encouraged me to successfully take the CPA exam.

Lydia Hadley - February 09, 2017 at 12:00 AM

DA

“ Roger.... You will surely be missed. I was your neighbor on Elm and High Street in Annville when I was about 13 years old. I remember your funny jokes and great sense of humor. Then about 2 years ago I met up with you again (40 years later) when I waited on you at Mel's Diner. And wow... You remembered me !!! Please dance with those angels and rest in peace. Sending my love and condolences to the family.

Dana - February 09, 2017 at 12:00 AM