

Peter Werrenrath's Tribute

The youngest...I always get to go last.

And save the best to the last...

Actually Dad was the best. His career was legendary. Starting out as a grunt at NBC in New York, he traveled to Chicago with Mom to start the first experimental TV station there. He created, produced and directed such classics as Ding Dong School, Zoo Parade and Walt's Workshop. He worked with Philip K. Wrigley, owner of the Chicago Cubs, and told him the best locations on the ball field to place the cameras. He worked with Gorgeous George, the wrestler. He interviewed Sally Rand, the fan dancer. He was part of the team of directors along with a young William Friedkin that covered the two Democratic conventions in Chicago starring Adlai Stevenson. He later developed Championship Bridge, with Charles Goren, and worked with Arnold Palmer, Gary Player and Jack Nicklaus on the World Series of Golf (*ask me later about the Arnold Palmer story*). And he worked with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on the 1964 Nobel Prize Awards.

How did he remain such a humble guy?

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I used to help Dad during his educational film phase. I was his main actor (cheap labor) and chief assistant. He taught me how to hold a still camera still, how to not put your finger over the lens, how to hold a 500 millimeter lens so that it didn't look like you were shooting during an earthquake. And he taught me the importance of composition.

I have only used what he taught me as an avocation. But Dad also helped launch the career of a great guy who is here with us today: Dugan Rossilini

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I like to joke that my parents raised 3 perfect children. While that may or may not be true, I gotta say that my dad was the perfect father.

I was at a life-help seminar many years ago that I was dragged to by my ex-. The speaker, a psychologist, asked the group, "Raise your hand if you've had a perfect childhood." I was the only one that raised my hand.

What does that tell you?

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Today, I'd like to talk about the lessons my Dad taught me.

He took me to Cubs games, he taught me how to take pictures and videos, how to figure things out for myself. He taught me about life. And he taught me how to treat other people.

Mom asked that I find an appropriate passage from the scriptures to illustrate my thoughts about Dad. I chose The Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. It's so important that it shows up twice in the New Testament: Luke 6:31 and Matthew 7:12. Thank God for the Internet!

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Many of you have probably heard Dad's own famous life lessons, his words to live by. And boy, did he ever live by these:

- Never walk past a sink full of dirty dishes
- Always do the right thing, even if no one is looking
- Never miss an opportunity to do a kind deed

And here are some lessons I learned from Dad directly:

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The only time I ever got spanked it was Kirie's fault. One day when I was about 4 years old, we were in the kitchen in Highland Park and I got mad at my big sister. She was probably trying to boss me around, and I wasn't having any of it. I remember inexplicably hitting her on her arm. I glanced panic-stricken at my Dad, and saw his expression change from loving father to something resembling a gargoyle. I tore out of the kitchen and bounded up the stairs, thinking I could escape. As I took the turn in the staircase, my Dad's shovel-sized hand whacked my behind and propelled me up the second flight of stairs. I hid in my room for several hours. When I sheepishly came downstairs, Dad just looked at me sternly and said: "Never hit a woman."

Kirie, I just want to say "I'm sorry." It'll never happen again.

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My dad and I were in the Great Ape House at the Lincoln Park Zoo. At one of the cages, I said, "Gee, Dad, that monkey is really ugly!".

He turned to me with a thoughtful expression on his face and said "Have you ever wondered what you look like to him?"

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When I was young, Dad and I used to go to uptown Highland Park and run errands together. He used to hold my hand as we walked from store to store. I remember thinking one day that I was a big boy. I looked up at him and said "Dad, I don't need to hold your hand anymore."

I wish I hadn't said that.

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Dad was a marvelous writer. Once I got an email from him that read:

Dear Pete:

If I had life to live over again, the only thing I'd change would be to have more children.

In his later years, Dad was in and out of Evanston Hospital and the McGaw Care Center. After one episode when he spent some time in McGaw, Dad sent me an email. I thought he was still in McGaw and sent him this response:

"Wow, Dad. They probably don't let you take your computer into McGaw, so does this mean you're home?"

Dad's reply was:

"Free at last."

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I remember Dad saying he and mom were on the "final glide path" when they were in their mid-60's, laughably considering "retirement". It was a long runway.

Dad never graduated college. He spent 4 years at Cornell in their architecture program. He must have wanted to get out into the real world, work, marry, and be with the love of his life. And now, Dad has graduated from the school of life, with honors

The last thing Dad said to me that made any sense was last January, and it was so typical of him. We were celebrating Mom's 105th birthday. As Alice and I were leaving their apartment after breakfast to head home, through hugs and kisses and a few tears, Dad said to me "Come back any time, Pete, any time."

Well today, September 21, is International Peace Day. I'm back, Dad, for you.

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I'm not sad. I spent the days after hearing about Dad's passing with a smile on my face...thinking of the wonderful things that he said and did throughout the almost 70 years of my life.

There are tears, however. What always gets me is not the sadness, or the void, or missing someone. Those are there, of course. What gets me is the kind things that people say or do in these situations. That's the beauty of such a passage. People get closer, they relate better to each other, they see life's vulnerabilities and strengths. That's what Dad was all about...bringing people together.

My dad had a great sense of humor, and always had a quiet strength about him. He was interested in everyone he met. Dad was the kindest, most sincere and interesting man I've ever known.

He was a bright, shining star, for Mom, Kirie, Ren and me, his mother and father, his brother and sister, nieces and nephews, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, in-laws, out-laws, adopted families, and all his friends, in the Second World War, during the early daze of television, through volcanoes and ice storms and slamming doors, through thick and thin, Dad's light shone through.

Thus endeth the lesson.

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If you are interested in seeing Dad's life in pictures, videos and words, please feel free to visit

www.ReinaldWerrenrath.com