

## Ren Werrenrath's Tribute

Thank you for joining our family in paying tribute to Dad.

I suspect many of you here today have at one time or another been drawn into a theological discussion with mom. True, David? One of mom's favorite stories is when she was growing up in the household of her Presbyterian minister father, who we affectionately called Backup. According to mom, one day about 90 years ago, when she was a teenager, she was wrestling with the literal interpretation of the Biblical stories about the miracles of Jesus, and confronted her father, probably while he was making one of his diabolical Wastetime wooden puzzles without any pictures on them. Mom asked her father how she was expected to believe the Biblical miracle stories. Her father strayed from traditional church dogma, and added his own generous dose of common sense. He answered simply: "Don't fret about that, because while what you believe is important, but it is more important HOW you live your life. "

Which brings us to dad, As we look back and celebrate dad's life today, it reminds us all of just HOW WELL he lived his long life.

When you drill down to the basics, I think he lived his life by following a few simple truths..and you will hear about some of dad's Pearls of Wisdom from Peter.....

**How** dad led his life was largely governed by three basic principles: **courage, humility, and grace**. It is a code of conduct shared by many in what has been rightfully called The Greatest Generation, because they suffered through the Great Depression and then were attacked, and fought and won the most grueling war in history.

For dad's part, he certainly showed **courage** to answer the call to duty, and accept the responsibility of an important and dangerous job during a war that saw over 400,000 brave Americans die. In WWII, Dad was directly involved for several long years in the treacherous job of taking back the Pacific from the Japanese. As Fighter Director Officer on the aircraft carrier USS Cabot from 1943 to August of 1945, dad used brand new technology called radar, first invented by the British in 1935. It was in combat that dad found himself in his first directing job: He was in the ship's tactical operations room called the Combat information Center, CIC, talking to Hellcat fighter pilots over the radio in dogfights against Japanese Zeros. Towards the end of the war, dad and the Cabot were literally in the middle of several of the largest Naval battles of WWII, and probably in history.... including the infamous and bloody Battle of

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Leyte Gulf , which was fought constantly over 5 long days and nights in Oct 1944. It was the last stand by the Japanese Imperial Navy, and during this battle was when they became so desperate that they first started to use Kamikazes. General McArthur was trying to take the Philippines back, (remember “I shall return”?), and Admirals Halsey and Nimitz led the 3d and 7th Fleets in daily combat with the Japanese Imperial Navy. In a typical 24 hour day during this battle, 250 US aircraft would be airborne, many from the Cabot under dad’s direction. There were times when the outcome was in doubt due to several blunders by the Admirals, but fortunately the US Navy prevailed. For dad’s part in the battle, he earned 2 bronze stars. A few months later, in Dec 1944, his ship was again attacked by Kamikazes, and one Zero crashed into the Cabot directly, just 25 feet from where dad was in the Combat Information Center...leaving a 6 foot wide hole in the bridge, killing 35 sailors. During that same time period, a typhoon hit their fleet, and 3 destroyers in his group were literally tipped over, and 700 sailors lost at sea.

Despite shouldering the unbearable weight of years of combat at sea and typhoons, dad came home with the **humility** to never brag about his life of accomplishments. Like so many WW II vets who faced the horrors of combat, he would keep to himself about being in the middle of so many life threatening battles at sea. I am really grateful mom was able to convince him when he was in his 90’s to finally set aside his modesty , and write private memoirs on both the Navy experience and his TV history, so his life stories would pass to us.

And finally, GRACE was perhaps the hallmark of his adult life. I expect each of you can picture an example of dad’s grace that you saw. He was not only a **gentle man**, but a gentleman. When he spoke with you, you left the conversation convinced he was sincerely more interested in what you had to say than telling you what he thought. A rare trait in today’s world. And he probably made you smile with his subtle wit. While the ups and downs of our lives sometimes makes us cranky, dad seemed to have the ability to retain steadiness, serenity, and grace that he often expressed in calm, quiet, humor. And when you asked him for his opinion, you found it grounded in simple truths and uncomplicated logic. I didn’t always agree with dad, but I knew his opinions were thoughtful, and that his acts were selfless.

Dad lived a life guided by those principles, and, as a result, to me, above all, dad was an incredible role model. His influence on my life will be with me forever.

We should also remember today that dad was on his lengthy life journey with a partner who influenced him and **HOW he lived** more than any other person. We all

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know who I am talking about...MOM. They were married a mind boggling 82 years, and dated for 4 years before that. If you want a good laugh, ask mom what she thinks about this 4 years now.

Mom says dad was her balance wheel, but I think mom was **that and much more** to dad. I believe the incredible length and durability of their marriage was largely due to the **mutually sustaining** relationship they had, based on the unconditional love and deep respect they held for each other.

Thank you again for joining our family in celebrating dad's life and that marriage today.