

In Memoriam
For my Father,
Gaylord Martin Edvenson
March 12, 1920 – July 22, 2009

My father had *this wonderful life*, despite the tragedies and losses he experienced early on.

His parents were married at the Rose Grove church in Rose Grove, Iowa in the Fall of 1914, the church where his mother had been confirmed some years earlier. They farmed in the Williams Iowa area, losing two sons who died in infancy. When Gaylord was born, however, there was one older sister, Genevieve, and one older brother, Everett, in the house, and two years later, another sister, Maurine, and, when he was six, another sister, Velma June. Yet, when Gaylord was 16, his mother died.

He rarely spoke about this, but it affected him deeply. He said they called the cause, 'MS'. His mother had become immobilized. After her death, the mattress was taken out of the house and set on fire. The family sang "Shall we gather by the river" – a memory he choked out on one of my visits to see him just a few years ago.

In high school, he did well in biology, and his teacher suggested he might study medicine. So, by the time he was twenty, he had gone off to St. Olaf College. There, old-fashioned letters kept him in touch. "Dear Folks," he wrote, "It certainly has been a busy day for me, and I have been looking for mail from you each day for the last week." He was working in the athletics department, had to buy a rubber apron, was bending "glass and needles" in Chem lab and burning his fingers, was found to be drinking coffee with others in their room, which anticipated a coffee party with new friends, and was planning visits and studies. He was dashing and erudite. He received a letter from Velma June in September, 1939, in part: "Dearest Gaylord, I am now in school writing this letter. . . I like school – but for one reason – that is, I never seem to be able to see Gaylord around anywhere, except his picture in the back of the assembly, which I study often. And then our new school bus is swell, but for one reason, that is, we have no fun because Gaylord is not there. I also miss carrying your books. But I wouldn't want to take you away from college for anything." Almost six months to the day later, Velma June was dead, a death that would never have occurred if the new penicillin, which was in public trials at the time, had been more widely available. I'm pretty sure Gaylord was rushing to see her, but was too late.

1940 brought other news too, and so Dad went into the Army Air Force, and off to the Burma theater as a bomber pilot. Returning from there, he went on to fly briefly commercially, I think, as well as hot-dog over the farm fields of friends and neighbors in Iowa on more than one occasion with small planes. But then it was time to go back to college and on to medical school. How could he not do what he could to keep people alive, after missing so those he had lost? He met our mother at college on a blind date, marrying on June 27, 1948 in Pittsburgh, her home town, and honeymooning at Niagara

Falls. She was a May Queen and a dancing star, a singer and lover of literature. He was a dashing man, a lover of fun, social parties, cigarettes and cocktails, and they had some years of real fun, him working towards his medical degree and Mom in and out of the Navy reserve.

When he was still in Iowa in medical school, he contracted the mumps, I believe. As an adult, this was deadly at the time, and he almost died. He became so ill with fever that his entire body was placed on ice. During that time, he firmly believed that he talked to his mother, Mabel, and his sister, Velma June, who urged him to stay – that he would see them later.

His education as a doctor was still ongoing when I was born in 1952. We lived in Chicago, then in Iowa Falls, and then back in Chicago, where his practice blossomed alongside of wonderful doctor friends, Dr. Ken Egen, Dr. R.W. Alexander, and Dr. Mellis among them.

His love for music came from his father, and he was a self-taught musician on many folk instruments. He loved playing with friends – guitar, banjo, concertina, harmonica, mandolin and auto-harp. He also loved to read: from science fiction and science to a wide variety of literature and medical journals. He loved target shooting in the basement with his buddies, but he also taught me chess – a man of many talents.

He was a crack carpenter as a hobby, and built stereo cabinets, tables and furniture for fun. This graduated into the hobby of building both small and large control-line model planes. He was fantastic at building them and flying them, while I helped outfit the cockpit with small trolls in pilot gear. His flying hobby also included some years with a shared ownership plane at Aurora airport, with 'RW.' Not to dwell on the line-up of autos he owned, from an antique Ford sedan to the sexy Toronado years. But not to forget the Farrugia's, who got him into Harley Davidson 1200's, and brought him a live turkey for Thanksgiving. Or the sidecar motorcycle he took us on rides in, for some years, only one of a number he owned, going back to his first trips off the Iowa family farm.

But basically, his life's best was when he got up every morning before dawn, and was walking the aisles of Augustana Hospital, and later Grant Hospital, checking on his patients, then driving to his office for office hours, and then making housecalls and doing phone work most of the evening and off-hours. As a child, he took me on his rounds. Then, there were the hours and hours of surgery, where he was noted for his precision and perfection. This included decades of rotating emergency-call status. At one point, we had six phones in our home – two lines, with two phones on each of three floors, so Dad wouldn't miss a call. That house, at the corner of Hiawatha and Minnehaha, was the Edvenson teepee in Chicago, a beehive of family activity.

But the long long hours of work and the stress also took its toll: He drank too much on occasion, he had terrible hours, and at the height of his career, he could be gruff and ungrateful. Then again, we were 4 children who couldn't help throwing up on the

summer car trip to Iowa, despite taking Dramamine. Dad's response was to assure us that some cows we could see standing on the roadside hills actually had longer legs on one side than the other. We, in turn, blessed his life with our childhood accomplishments – athletic, musical and otherwise.

Now, I think we understand his frustrations with our mother to some degree, but back then, we were young and saddened by the tension. When Mom and Dad told me they were considering a divorce, I was in college and relieved: I told them I thought everything would be fine. In fact, it was fine, although it took Dad a while to get his home routine in order.

Still, he made us all proud by filling his life with new and old friends. Becoming the most accomplished cook and grill artist, and sharing his family recipes with us was only one way we kept in touch in the later years. Especially after he closed his last office, he loved to read and watch old movies, and became a wonderful home-body, a neighborhood walker, one with a green thumb and a fantastic backyard garden, one who would welcome any neighbor and friend to sit and chat, and enjoy life.

I think of Dad as a very happy man, by nature. But Dad was also always a doctor – always caring for us, always nurturing our dreams, always listening with his heart. He made our spirits large with his readings, his lessons, his advice, and our lives rich with his generosity of spirit. His zest for life is what remains in my mind, the image I will cement there and try to emulate.

Especially proud to be Norwegian, he came to Norway once, a family trip I didn't take. But he was so proud of me when I told him he needed to meet a certain Norwegian, even though that man and I were already engaged to be married. That was a bit over 10 years ago, and we married in Chicago so Dad could be there. Now, I know he walks with me here again, in Norway – finally visiting me here.

I gave him a poem I loved in college, and he loved it so much, it stood on his refrigerator door for many years. I think it speaks to the strength of his emotional depth. I would like to end by quoting from it, Matthew Arnold's *The Buried Life*:

But often, in the world's most crowded streets,
But often, in the din of strife,
There rises an unspeakable desire
After the knowledge of our buried life;
A thirst to spend our fire and restless force
In tracking out our true, original course;
A longing to inquire
Into the mystery of this heart which beats
So wild, so deep in us--to know
Whence our lives come and where they go.
And many a man in his own breast then delves,
But deep enough, alas! none ever mines.

And we have been on many thousand lines,
And we have shown, on each, spirit and power;
But hardly have we, for one little hour,
Been on our own line, have we been ourselves--
Hardly had skill to utter one of all
The nameless feelings that course through our breast,
But they course on for ever unexpress'd.
And long we try in vain to speak and act
Our hidden self, and what we say and do
Is eloquent, is well--but 'tis not true!
And then we will no more be rack'd
With inward striving, and demand
Of all the thousand nothings of the hour
Their stupefying power;

.

Only--but this is rare--
When a beloved hand is laid in ours,
When, jaded with the rush and glare
Of the interminable hours,
Our eyes can in another's eyes read clear,
When our world-deafen'd ear
Is by the tones of a loved voice caress'd--
A bolt is shot back somewhere in our breast,
And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again.
The eye sinks inward, and the heart lies plain,
And what we mean, we say, and what we would, we know.
A man becomes aware of his life's flow,
And hears its winding murmur; and he sees
The meadows where it glides, the sun, the breeze.

And there arrives a lull in the hot race
Wherein he doth for ever chase
That flying and elusive shadow, rest.
An air of coolness plays upon his face,
And an unwonted calm pervades his breast.
And then he thinks he knows
The hills where his life rose,
And the sea where it goes.

Dad, I know you're with the family now, and I'm so happy for you. We all loved you, just as you loved us. And you did have *this wonderful life*.

