

Eulogy for Reginald S. Koehler
By Robert S. Koehler

The first picture that I have in my mind of dad is his coming home to 10 Wilson Drive in Ben Avon Heights, PA near Pittsburgh after he was done fighting the war in Korea.

I see him riding up the driveway in the cab

- Worried about his father's reaction
- Wondering whether his parents would be proud to see him
- And Anxious to embrace his father and mother

And I feel like I can see him getting out of the cab, his parents coming out to hug him and standing with both his parents and the taxicab driver who joined them in a long group embrace.

He attended Shadyside Academy where he finished 3rd in his class which showed his intellect and, as he described it, his prestigious short-term memory that allowed him to cram successfully for tests. By his account he scored a perfect 800 on his Spanish PSAT's and if he had landed in Spain would barely have been able to say hello.

He went on to attend Yale because as he said, New Haven had more movie theatres than any other college town he visited though I think he was downplaying his achievements, something he did often throughout life.

At Yale he had too much fun in his first two years and was advised that he was being dismissed by the university thereby becoming draft eligible. He decided to sign up to serve in the army and after training was sent to the Korea where he served on the front lines lighting up the front line and the enemy for the rear artillery battalions.

Though like many veterans he would rarely talk about it afterwards, I think he grew up in Korea. He served feeling that he had disappointed his father and would spend the rest of his life trying to make that up. There were three people that I know of that were instrumental to his survival in Korea. Willie Davis, a former Golden Gloves boxer from Detroit and his foxhole buddy in Korea. His mother Esther Hawken Koehler who would mail him books every week as he became a voracious reader to pass the time and the main character in his life, Ann Ellsworth Rowland, my mom, the only person who wrote him every week during the war.

There are not many people who can say that their father attended their mother's wedding engagement party twice. My dad is one of them. After he got back from the war and was readmitted to Yale, where he finished in the top 10% of his class, he got invited to my mom's engagement party to Johnny Dodge, where he told my future grandfather at the time that he wished it was him getting married to Ann. The planned engagement fizzled out and upon learning the news, my dad called mom to let her know that he would "be in the area" and could he come by and say hello. The rest is history

No story of my dad is complete without describing my mom, his bride of 64 years who he loved and adored. Mom, aside from Johnny Dodge, you have great taste in men. Dad, thank you for having the foresight and great taste to choose mom as the woman who you would love, honor and cherish all of your days. Mom, thank you for loving dad in sickness and in health, in good times and bad. You two were evidence as recorded in Corinthians and recited often on wedding days that love is patient, love is kind, it does not boast, it is not proud, it is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. Mom, you fought the good fight with him since his cancer surgery in 2005 and have

been a loving, loyal and faithful caretaker since that time. God Bless you Mom.

After getting married to mom in 1956 he went on to graduate from Harvard Law school and to have three children, starting with my sister Vicky in Cambridge, MA, my sister Cindy in CT and myself.

Growing up my dad taught me some of the following:

1. Learn from your mistakes. I greatly appreciate that my dad was honest and never held himself up as perfect. In the paraphrase of John 1 “if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. My dad admitted to being fully human and in so doing led with and urged compassion. It was my dad, who in the lowest moments of my life, asked another to please give me a second chance. He also tried teaching me fiscal responsibility. After I bounced my first check in high school, I remember him stating in exasperation “you can remember what Roberto Clemente batted in 1966 but you can’t balance your checkbook?”317 Dad, Roberto Clemente batted .317 in 1966 and was the National League MVP.
2. He said frequently “I will always love you though I reserve the right to be disappointed in you”. What a

great message from my perspective. I always felt the unconditional love of my dad which I treasured and was lucky to have. Though I disappointed him several times, he kept to his word and loved me regardless. At the dinner table he would repeat what he had been told by his father “I believe that the sun rises and sets in your backyard”

3. “Set standards of excellence for yourself”. He helped me cultivate a work ethic that allowed me to succeed at school when I applied myself and at work. While I have had to amend the saying at times to ‘progress, not perfection’, he helped me set high standards for myself
4. “Be the bigger person”. I learned eventually that this was in the spirit of true Christian faith from the Gospel of Matthew “If anyone slaps you in the right cheek, turn to him the other also”. Early in my marriage Jennifer would ask me why I couldn’t follow my father’s advice. Once I learned the true meaning of what dad was trying to teach me, I became a better husband and father.
5. ‘Never hit your sister’. Ok, as soon as I grew as tall as my sisters, I immediately violated this rule...and the larger point, honor and respect women, was a message ahead of its time. To this day, I respect his fight in the male dominated world of New York City law, to make

the first female partner at his law firm Donovan and Leisure.

6. Believe in God. Some of my best times with dad were my walks with him to Christ Church in Bronxville for Lent. I still have a copy of his long letter to me that he inserted inside a copy of 'Mere Christianity' by C.S. Lewis. In it he encouraged me to read C.S. Lewis, the Bible and to seek out God. While he knew that he could not make me drink, he was determined to lead this horse to water.

And it was often lots of fun to be around my dad:

- I remember how he would tell Stories at the dinner table
- I remember him teaching us how to gently shut a car door at Playland in Maine such that he locked himself out of our brand-new Volvo and he had to smash the side window with a rock to get back in
- I think of watching him take 49 pictures of every family dinner, the photos which we never saw unless they were occasionally inserted into the family newsletter
- I remember endless slides of his trips to France with mom showing every meal, boring statue and church. I dreaded these slide shows at the time and would

now pay so much to hear him narrate them one more time...because I miss his voice, his joy and his passion and have for some time.

He was witty, intelligent, had a great sense of humor and a sense of compassion.

And now I come back to that one scene that I have been playing in my mind, Dad riding up in the cab to the front door of 10 Wilson Drive, only now it is not his return from Korea, it is his departure from Kennebunkport and the surly bonds of earth. He is going up the driveway anxious to see his eternal father wondering what the reunion will be like.

And slipping out of his mortal bonds, his human shell, I see him being hugged and told "well done good and faithful servant". And I think of one of my favorite movies, Rachel's Getting Married, where amidst the pain and the anguish, the family gets together for a feast worthy of the 12 disciples. The film captures the glow of being around loved ones we rarely see, the high of having them all together at once and the reluctance of anyone to leave because the first of us to do so signals the beginning of the end. For now, the end is only Reg's time on earth. I see him in a heaven with God there to

wipe away the tears, where there is joy and sorrow, pain and love and Dad is pouring wine, telling stories and leading the feast and celebration where we will all reunite, faithful in the knowledge that while God is sometimes injured by our choices, he loves us no matter what, much as my father did all of us.

I will miss you. God Bless you Dad. I can't wait to see you again.