

Thanks for bearing with me as I try to talk to you about one of the two strongest, toughest and bravest men I've ever had the privilege to know. The only way I can think to do this is to recount some of the memories I have and others have shared with me.

Let's start with an early one. When they were kids, my Dad and his brother Malcolm built a go-cart with the help of my grandfather, using wheels from an old pram and a handbrake consisting of a wooden lever which they pressed against the rear wheels. It could seat two kids and have another on a running board and was steered by means of a pair of rope handles. After testing it a little, they found they could ride it down the driveway of their house in Great South Rd and slide to a halt directly in front of the garage by yanking on the handbrake. As their confidence grew, they proceeded further and further up the driveway until they reached the top. During their last run, the brake handle snapped and the go-cart - with both brothers clinging on tightly - proceeded to crash right through the garage door. It's fair to say that Grandad was far from pleased...

After he had to set aside his academic life to manage my grandfather's construction business, the two of them worked on many roading and drainage contracts. Under his watch, the business became more efficient and successful and they continued to work together for a number of years. All young families struggle to make ends meet and my family were no different. But my brother's illness added extra pressure on the family finances. The cost of David's treatment was the equivalent of a week's wages in every month and my dad worked three different jobs to make ends meet. He would get up around 5am and clean the tollbooths on the Auckland Harbour Bridge, then go to work with my granddad all day digging drains. After a brief break for dinner and a wash, he would then drive to a pub after closing time and clean it. He would finally return home around 1am, collapse into bed and begin the whole cycle over again the next working day.

Despite this, it wasn't all grunt and grind. One day he built a fairly large kite with the help of a couple of friends and painted a devil-like face on the front. He ran the kite out on a long fishing line as high as it could go, in a fairly steady breeze. When the fishing line played out, he extended the line length with a second roll of heavier fishing line and a length of cable until the kite was so high, it couldn't actually be seen with the naked eye. Lunch was called and he lashed the cable to the veranda to grab a bite and 30 minutes later was surprised to see a police prowler car come up the drive. The officer inspected the cable and then asked him politely to please reel in the kite, which was apparently interfering with public airspace and had rather startled a particularly low-flying private pilot.

Over the years, Dad had a number of hobbies; In his youth, he did a bit of diving, beginning with the "Michellin-Man" glass-and-brass, hose-and-pump arrangement and later switching to new SCUBA technology, which he used for a fair bit of spear fishing. He played badminton and table tennis, was quite a dab hand at chess and a pretty formidable bridge player. He had a lifelong interest in photography and spent many hours developing and putting together video compilations, both for himself and others. He was a pretty good keyboard player and would happily tickle the ivories on warm summer afternoons with the windows open. The neighbours didn't seem to mind and would sometimes shout out a request or two if they were working in the adjoining block.

Dad liked to laugh and make others laugh. He seemed to have an endless store of jokes and had an Irishman's' talent for storytelling at a time when it was a skill that people actively coveted, long before the days of internet memes and throw-away one liners. He could tailor his jokes to his audience, carefully filtering the bluer ones where applicable...and then telling them once the kids and more easily-offended souls were out of earshot.

He had a real affinity with both animals and small children. Cats and dogs would sidle up to him, ignoring all others in the room. Toddlers in restaurants, shopping centres and most recently in hospital would make their way over on shaky legs, steady themselves on his knees and smile up at him. When we worked in the kiwifruit or mandarins there always seemed to be a fantail or tui that would suddenly appear and hang around while he talked to them. Once while mowing the bottom block, a quail fluttered up onto the bonnet of the tractor and made a bit of a fuss until he stopped. It then hopped down into the bamboo and emerged seconds later with a half dozen chicks and shot across the block.

While my Mum was often the daily disciplinarian (a job that understandably taxed her sanity), Dad's no-nonsense approach concerning bad behaviour was something that made both my brother and I quake at times. Many was the time that he would hand me a pair of secateurs and send me to the bottom of the orchard to cut a willow stick, with the promise that if he lashed the stick against a fencepost and broke it, I would be sent to fetch another and a double helping of corporal punishment would be administered on my return. Often the eventual stripes I received were few and comparatively inconsequential, compared to the "walk of shame" which he wisely knew gave me the chance to contemplate the error of my ways and was for me at least, the harshest part of my punishment. But once punishment was administered, as far as he was concerned the slate was wiped clean and no more was said. I always respected him for that.

He and Mum always made time for us, but being boys it was generally Dad who took a more active role in our various boyhood hobbies and interests, with Mum on the sidelines at times. I can remember many games of bushel-box cricket with wooden tangelo cases as wickets, set up on a sloping strip of land alongside the shed. Dad mowed a small square of empty nursery land in the bottom block, which was used by the whole family both as a makeshift tennis court and boomerang throwing arena and we all spent a fair few happy hours there and lost a lot of tennis balls and boomerangs in the branches of the macrocarpa pines. Dad helped us collect matchbox cars, build model airplanes and even constructed a large chipboard table in our attic on which he built a fairly impressive model railway set-up.

He managed to obtain an old plywood car-crate, which he dismantled and used to build an A-frame hut on stilts under the largest of our walnut trees, complete with a bunk bed, door and window. He got hold of a pair of old crank-handle telephones and strung a wire between the house and the hut, so Mum could crank the handle to let us know that our presence was required. We spent many happy hours playing the games that all children play without adult supervision, growing in personal confidence as we did so.

During my early college years, I developed an interest in the then emerging field of computing. My school was one of the first in NZ to get a small compliment of workstations, but because my math's grades were not up to scratch and I was not permitted to undertake formal classes. It was my Dad who spotted an ad in the local paper for a week-long "Learn to program computers" course, being offered by the Manukau Technical College. He took me out of school for a week and we attended and completed the course together. He then bought for a TRS-80 which at the time was considered a fairly powerful model. I had to repay my half of the cost by extra work around the orchard. In the years that followed, it became an interest that we continued to share and which I would eventually make a career out of.

After I left home, we kept in pretty close and regular contact even when I emigrated to the UK; initially for 2 years but which became closer to 20 years. His advice was always welcome and the fundamental skills he had helped to instil from an early age served me extremely well throughout my career. When Su and I came back to NZ in 2010, he and I worked together as a team on the orchard and also at the flats in Rotorua. The hour-long drive each way between Rotorua and Tauranga gave us time to talk on a great range of topics; we solved the worlds' problems, found solutions for things that needed doing, buried hatchets, gave assurances and forgiveness from each other and became more than father and son; we became mates.

In his battle with Pancreatic cancer, he defied all predictions and prognosis. From the beginning he elected to fight this terrible disease as hard as possible, choosing the toughest form of chemotherapy available, which gave him the best chance in the battle, but also carried the highest risk of side effects. A normal prognosis for advanced pancreatic cancer is 6-9 months but Dad fought a truly titanic battle for almost 5 years. If he had been a soldier and fought as hard and as successfully for so long, he would have been weighed down by the medals we would bestow on him. His battle was nothing less that epic and I'm sure that all his friends and family here today are equally awed by his courage, strength and tenacity.

I would now like to take this opportunity to give sincere and grateful thanks to everyone that helped us with all kinds of love and support. But I would like to make three special mentions;

- Firstly to my uncle Malcolm, who - when we reached out for help and assistance in Dads final days, dropped everything and immediately came over and was there through the most difficult days. This must have been particularly hard for him, because he had also almost single-handedly nursed and supported my aunt Margaret through the same disease less than 2 years ago.

- Secondly to my uncle Bob, who arrived shortly afterwards and was also present through the darkest and hardest days and who also offered welcome advice and practical help. There is no way that Mum and I could have coped without their wholehearted support and assistance. Thank you both; I doubt I will ever be able to repay you for your amazing support, love and kindness.

- Lastly, to my Japanese uncle Keizo. My dad's sudden and dramatic decline in health meant that I had no time to reach out to inform him of the situation. Yet somehow, Keizo knew there was something wrong and after discussing the situation with his 90-year old mother, made the awesome journey from Matsuyama in Japan, to be with us in Tauranga, a journey which took more than 24 hours and which brought him to see dad just 3 hours before he died.

You are all the very definition of love and loyalty and I am honoured and grateful to be a part of your family.

And now, it is time to part and to say a final farewell. If Dad was somehow able to hear me, I would like him to know this above all; Dad - all that is good in me, is from mum and you. My mistakes and shortcomings are my own. I will forever miss your kindness, strength, wisdom and courage. I am enormously proud to be your son. I will always cherish the memories we made together and will carry you in my heart until the curtain comes down on my life.