

## Do It Right, Or Don't Do It At All

December 31, 2011

49 years ago today, Eugene Carl Madalinski was awaiting the birth of his second child. With a few hours to spare, his second son arrived, delivering a tax deduction for the year 1962. Dad won a bottle of scotch that night for being the father of the last child born that year at Ravenswood hospital. But I was the real winner, in gaining a great father.

This is not a time for sadness. This is a time for remembrances, and hope.

My earliest, specific, memory of dad was one of our many visits to an emergency room together. My right ankle was torn up, my foot bloody and dangling. A half hour later, I asked him what the doctors were talking about. What did "amputate" mean? He explained it, and we came to a swift understanding. *That was not going to happen.* When I tell this story for fun, I usually remark that I should have said, "but Dad, the Cubs are going to need me someday". I was too young and too scared to be that quick, that day. Thankfully, dad was there to speak on my behalf.

One of my clearest memories of dad occurred years later. The CJ-5 (with "Renegade" in big letters on the hood, as if that needed to be explicit) was waiting in the driveway for the first drive to college any Malin had embarked on. The loud, well-worn Jeep contained all I had, beyond \$33 in my pocket. Dad came out and asked if I needed anything. I chuckled and said "no, dad, I got it covered". He shook my hand, and simply said "you can do it, son". I always appreciated that he disregarded evidence to the contrary.

He slipped me a few bills, as he did grandkids whenever moms weren't looking. Now flush with \$83, I backed out of the driveway, and headed off to chart a new course.

It was an improbable course, at times, between those memories. But I was always guided by his presence, whether in person or in spirit. His advice, offered in words, was typically short, and precise. "Use the right tool for the job." "Put the tools back where you found them."

“Never, ever, hit a girl.” “No one can take your education, or your integrity, from you.” “Treat women with respect.” “Do it right, or don’t do it at all.” I can’t recall him ever saying I should try my best. Trying wasn’t sufficient. It was, always, “do it right, or don’t do it at all”. Good advice for a life well spent.

It was what he didn’t say that spoke the loudest. He was dealt a bad hand but I never once heard him complain. He probably contracted tuberculosis in service to the nation, as a machinist mate toiling in the engine rooms of Navy ships. He loved those ships, as he loved the nation they protected. He was, decidedly, American. Modest beginnings, dreams for his children without bounds, and a dedication to the ideals of equality, personal industry, and personal responsibility. Not exactly Jeffersonian, but “do it right, or don’t do it at all”, served well for my founding father. Born a first generation American with the colorful name of Madalinski, he crafted the new last name of Malin for a new, American family.

The family took some twists and turns. That he was awarded custody of two boys in the mid 60s, and raised them on his own for the first of two stints as a single father, is all you need to know about his commitment to fatherhood. As the second version of his family grew in the late 60s, and the tuberculosis spread unknown to others, he worked every day to provide for his family, until the day he collapsed at work. He surely knew he was ill, but demonstrated courage beyond words in keeping his family together as best he could, for as long as he could. I know this for sure – his resolve, grace and love for his family guided him through the hell of the tuberculosis sanitarium, as it provided hope for Gene and me at the orphanage.

That same love and grace was evident in the care of his second wife Sheri, as she battled cancer when he got out of the sanitarium, and in his 32 years of marriage to Pat, who was a blessing to a man who was owed at least one by the detours life placed in his path. Thank you, Pat, for caring for him as you did.

That path has now come to its fate. My father, eldest son and last remaining in the Madalinski lineage, is mortal, after all. I’m still a little stunned by that.

Dad's DNA carries on in two sons, one of which I am lucky to be, and three grandchildren, which Cheryl and Marcia have blessed his sons with. Eugene Carl Madalinski lives on in Amanda, Colin and Michelle, and in this I am determined to find no sadness, only hope.

Here is the essential truth of dad's life. He was a man of kindness, grace and duty to others before himself. Let us commit ourselves to carrying forward in that same spirit of duty, grace, and kindness.

Thank you Dad. You most assuredly, did it right.