

Memories of Robert Fertado

by Angela Caragan – 4/10/2012

My dad.... Or "Pops" to many of my childhood friends, such as Eddie and Misty...

There are so many words that can be used to describe him – many of which have already been used today and will likely be used in the future when reflecting on his life and the impact he made on all of ours. But there's one word that truly captures "dad" as I know dad... That is "quirky". So, "Quirky" is where I will start. Everyone has their own idiosyncrasies, but dad owned his oh so well. Who can be allergic to nothing and everything all at the same time? I know my grandma slipped cinnamon (which he claimed to be allergic to) more than once into his food with no adverse reaction. But we never did any of that, did we mom or Robin? :D

The Friday after dad was gone, when Robin, Mom and I were leaving the house, mom switched on the radio to make it sound like someone was home and turned on, as she put it "dad's alarm". Robin and I just rolled our eyes at each other. It was so "typical quirky dad". I decided right there that I will forever be rolling my eyes at "dad-isms". And in doing so, I will be honoring his memory and allowing him to live on in his own quirky way in our hearts.

As I stand here today, I find it hard and somewhat cliché to even say this... But it truly is hard to summarize one's life in mere words, sentences, paragraphs, or even books. It's no wonder royalty had professional documenters for their lives. And if you think about it, in some ways, we have documentation of dad's life. But his life journal isn't written on paper or ink. Instead, it is written in our hearts, in our memories, and on the lives of the numerous friends and family around us – all those who have been impacted by his single life.

As I can't capture his entire life in these few minutes that I have before you, I just have a few memories and personal stories that I'd like to share. So, please join me as we take a quick highlights only tour of dad's life from a daughter's perspective.

One of my first memories of Dad was his love for art, creativity and photography. It makes sense that he went for an art degree. His obsessive love of cameras and photographs was obvious. I think I practically came out of the womb posing for my portraits – weight on back leg, head at 45 degree angle to shoulders, chin pushed forward and down, eyebrows up and big smile. There were always new cameras, new lenses and new lighting to try out on his not-always-so-willing victims – I mean - subjects. And even though he was a photographer and he should have known better, I was the classic of 2nd child syndrome – almost all my baby pictures are with my sister!

Although I wasn't always as thrilled to be trying out his new camera equipment, I did learn to love photography – being BEHIND the camera, that is. During college, I ran around with his old 35mm camera with a roll of black and white. Then, developing it in the darkroom and working toward the right exposure and development.

His meticulous, borderline obsessive drive for quality inadvertently rubbed off on me. I'm reminded of this as I drive myself crazy working on my projects whether at work or for my own personal endeavors. I know that my dedication to quality derives itself from the basis of his life and what ultimately was my parent's photography slogan – "Robert's Photography - Where Quality Counts". I learned that good wasn't good enough. Great is better and perfection although not always attainable is what we strive for and it is... well, it's perfect. So I apologize in advance and blame him if ever I drive any of you crazy working towards perfection.

And with that determination, whatever he put his mind to and really went after, he almost always attained.

He was ever faithful at providing for our family and the church, working three jobs - as a pastor, a photographer and as a 7-UP driver all at the same time. Even though he was often exhausted from keeping that kind of schedule, he still tried to do little things for the family. Dad coming home from work was always fun time – often he brought us treats or fun things. I remember one time he called and told us he was bringing home a "whachamacallit". At around age 5, I had no idea what he was talking and thought he was being silly, until he came in with a candy bar.

He maintained this pace for many years until he retired from 7-UP going into photography full-time. That commitment to providing for the family has made a huge impact on my life. I'm grateful that I grew up in a home where we didn't live extravagantly or always have the top name brand items, but we lived comfortably within our means and saved every extra penny for a rainy day. Because a rainy day will come and blow the roof tiles off in freak El Nino rains and ultimately need some repairs in the roof. I try to live by those same principles to this day.

He never claimed to be smart. He said he was bad at math, science and the educational subjects. But I don't know if I can believe that. You see, he could probably hold his own in a physics discussion about drip systems, water pressure, drips per minute, gallons per hour, layout of the tubes and tips and kinds and feet, inches, etc. I think he may have known more about his garden drip system than the drip system people themselves! That's a whole lot of math, physics and architecture.

He really loved his garden and was proud of it and the drip system that he put in not more than a few years ago. Even though mom tried to make it a California-native and more lush, pretty garden, his art background came bounding out as he would buy angular trees and shrubs. And

of course, all his loved and somewhat-cold. They never did match the rest of the garden, but oh how he loved them.

He was always working in the yard. And my parent's yard is proof of that work. All our family parties and events – even Robin & Jan's wedding – have been held there. And thankfully, more than once his yard knowledge paid off in my own little back yard. His helping – whether it be loaning his gardening tools, pruning a bush for us or digging a hole for the mallow that I somehow managed to kill – or digging a hole for the second mallow I killed – it was his way of showing his care and love.

Gardening was just one of his many hobbies. Anyone who has known him for any length of time can attest to him always being involved in some kind of hobby or research project. I don't remember a time when he wasn't working on some hobby project. Whatever his new fad was, he would be obsessively researching to find the best, the newest, the most unique of whatever it was at the moment. Endless phone calls, emails, letters, store trips, and online research.

Oh how he loved his hobbies! Never have I met someone who could talk the ears off my friends about his hobbies more than my dad. And usually random hobbies at that! They were never your classic run of the mill hobbies. Some of my poor friends got sucked into more than one conversation about knife sharpening, fishtanks, reverse osmosis water, gourmet teas or were obligated to sit through a trick yo-yo show.

I remember once when I was still living at home, my friend Crystal came by to pick me up to go to dinner with her. When we came back home, he found out she enjoyed tea and offered her a cup. He then proceeded to show her every tea he had, had her tasting them, talking about perfect brewing temperatures, time and techniques. I don't know if she or I exchanged more than a few words that night thanks to his tea monologue.

That wasn't the only time he provided awesome entertainment for me and my friends. Usually Eddie was the one egging him on and he didn't even know it. I think there are more stories than we have time for today that involves Eddie slyly teasing him. If you want to ask about them later, hit up Eddie for the stories. I'm sure he'll be willing to share. But the one that sticks out in my mind the most was the time where Eddie came in wearing flip flops. Dad apparently didn't get the memo that their name had been changed since the time they were popular in the 70s and 80s. Let's just say that Eddie had a field day asking dad about his experience wearing 'thongs' and all the fine details about it. Robin and I had to leave the room after a few minutes in order to not burst out laughing and ruin the hilarious dialog that was happening in the living room. I'm not sure he ever knew about that episode, but it has remained one of our favorite 'dad' stories to date.

In some ways, his innocence and naivety, served him well. You see, I am not sure he ever completely grew up. Part of him was absolutely an entirely responsible and somewhat conservative adult, but there was also a large portion of him that was all kid. For example, taking on a trick yo-yo hobby and trick kite flying as an adult. Who does that? This attribute however served him well, especially when Robin and I were younger.

I recall nights when I was little laying in mom and dad's king size waterbed – boy was that thing fun to slosh around on! We'd lay there at bedtime while he read us much-loved and worn-out books like "How Now Brown Cow". Or when he would sometimes invent his own stories – one of which I remember came up often. It was the story of "George the Roof" and his friend "Sally the Carpet". I remember a tale about when George wandered off one day and the rain came. Poor Sally the Carpet shrank because of the water and had to be stretched back out.

His stories were always silly, funny, farfetched, and - like him –quirky.

After we grew up, he still would write big kid-like cartoon smiley faces with the word "SMILE" next to them on notes and cards. And in recent years, he was a big source of humor and laughter for his mom - my grandma - as she struggles with dementia. Over the past few years, he called her almost nightly to sing her oldies or made-up silly songs. His goal was to have her laughing before she went to bed every night so that she would have a cheery night and sleep well. And he almost always succeeded at that goal. Although she had a lot of sadness in her life, I know that my dad was always a sunny spot and this labor of love was a source of happiness for her.

His somewhat child-like humor and his free spirit served him well as grandpa to Essie. They would often "talk" in baby language, making random noises and silly faces. She would mimic him and they would carry on grunting, growling, singing, and making all sorts of silly noises together. He loved his grandbaby. And although he never really admitted it, I know he loved his grand "puppy" as well. He really didn't like cats or dogs, but I think Laila changed his mind. He was always bragging to people about her behavior, commands, tricks, and how good she was – even though I knew she wasn't quite as good as he thought she was. More than once, we caught him calling her up on the couch to sit by him.

He really loved his family, although he didn't always say it. He showed it in his own way – usually by doing things for us - helping us with all kinds of things around the house, by researching things to death for us. I think he sent us home with more magazines and articles from the newspaper that he cut out than I can count. We finally got smart in recent years and started using his research abilities to our own advantage – especially when it came to buying cars, camera lenses, or a whole gamut of other products. I knew that if I put him on the task, he would find the best quality for the best price.

I also know he was proud of his family by how he bragged to anyone who would listen. He told everyone about my job, hobbies and how “muscle” I am and how I must have got that from him since he used to lift weights when he was younger. He would talk about Mom’s superwoman strength through her fight with cancer, Robin’s profession, Essie’s signing abilities, Eddie’s career change, and Jan’s animated signing abilities. In the past year, he learned how to manipulate the Filipina nurses by telling them all about his Filipino son in laws. Funny thing was – it usually worked! Go dad!

We went on many family vacations over the years, but since he wouldn’t fly anywhere in an airplane, we never got very far. I think it had to do with some really bad flight he had out to Texas to boot camp when he entered the air force... But he still made it a point to take us to our frequent vacation spots within California. We went to Monterey, Yosemite, Disneyland and more. Oh how he loved those places. Our trips to nature-centric locations were perfect for photographing and were an awesome place to take the bicycles out for a spin.

We often went to Disneyland with our friends, the Rae family. Oren once got Dad on a few “scary” rides –you probably saw the evidence of that in the slideshow earlier. The only way he got him on them was by hiding the fact that they were indeed scary. Once he went on, we never could get him on a second time. He made his mind up that once was enough and he didn’t like those scary rides. We all knew his mind was made up, there really was no changing it.

He was this way about many areas of life. Once he researched and figured out what he believed, he was passionate about his beliefs, never backing down and was stubbornly faithful to it.

This quality served him well with the church. As many here know, leading a church has ups and downs. He was doggedly loyal to the call of God in his life, never deviating from his crystal clear call to the city. I recall many times where he would stand behind this very pulpit and peek around the corner saying, “if I gave up now, someone might be right around the corner. I can’t quit now. What if I had quit when some of you were right around the corner?” That is why when someone asks me how I am doing, I can honestly say that considering the situation, I’m doing well. We stand tall and look outward. Because there may be someone just around the corner that I can help, that I can assist even in this time of sorrow.

I learned a profound lesson about dedication, passion for your call, and loyalty by watching his ministry here in Benicia. I now throw myself passionately and with dedication into my own ministries and in my own personal endeavors. He never cared what everyone else was doing and if they necessarily agreed with him or if he was the most popular person around. He stuck to what he believed in, regardless of peer pressure. And big part of that life lesson rubbed off on me. So for any stubbornness or dogged loyalty to my beliefs, I blame dad.

He was absolutely solid on his beliefs about God, salvation and his heavenly inheritance. He often preached about the “earnest of our inheritance”. He used the Costco sample example on Sunday mornings when we were all starving around lunch time. He would describe how here on earth, we get a sampling of heaven in the form of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Just a little taste of what was to come – and eventually, we’d receive our inheritance - the whole pizza. Dad got his whole pizza.

So while we do feel saddened at our loss, it is a bittersweet loss. We are comforted by the fact that he is – not in the happiest place on earth, Disneyland – but instead is in the happiest place OFF of earth. He has reached his ultimate goal – the thing he preached and believed for so many years. He is finally able to see Jesus and meet his savior face to face. I imagine between all the worship and praise on streets of gold, he is enjoying rolling hills with a great wind to improve and perfect his trick kite skills. But the winds can’t be too perfect because with his personality, there’s really no fun without some kind of challenge.

And like Eddie said... Dad, please don’t harass the angels about how many calories or what ingredients are in the food at buffet – you’re not allergic to anything anymore! You don’t have to worry about nutritional content or health food.

I’m sure he’s getting all our gardens around our heavenly mansions ready. Maybe there will be a succulent or two. I guess we won’t mind by then. I just hope he remembers to put in a wisteria and maybe a mallow for me, since I obviously have no luck with them down here!

Over the 30 years that I have known my dad, so much has happened and changed... That sloshy waterbed has been emptied and replaced with a properly-back-supporting, overly-researched and returned too frequently mattress. Sally the carpet has since been replaced with better-than-pergo flooring. The family has grown, matured, got new jobs, and houses.

But there are things that haven’t and will likely never change - George the roof continues to stand guard over the house, the garden sports an occasional sentimental succulent eyesore, we roll our eyes at quirky dad-isms. And we make no apologies for it, for in each of these things, they represent the profound impacts on lives of each of us. May we remember the good times, the happy memories and take his good qualities and apply them to our own lives. In doing so, dad will live on stamped in our hearts and our minds forever.

So, while he lives on in our hearts, we still sorrow for our loss. And while that sorrow is great, our heavenly hope is as well. We take comfort in knowing that someday, we will be reunited. ‘Til we meet again...