

[\(Click here for the slides that accompany this speech\)](#)

Prelude

[slide 1]

The last phone call I had with my Dad, a couple days before his fall, I had just given a technical talk at work and he asked me about it and I told him I'd give him a private presentation when I saw him next. I didn't get a chance to do that, and this is probably the wrong moment for that particular talk. But I thought my Dad would get a kick out of me using a slideshow format for his celebration, so that's what I have chosen to do.

Preparing for this was daunting because there are so many dimensions to my history with my father that I can't hope to summarize them in a speech of any length, so my plan here is to go over a few photos and artifacts that I find meaningful and that reveal aspects of my Dad's personality and character that I treasure.

Let me start by saying that I've felt so many emotions over the past few weeks, but the one that dominates is gratitude.

Above all, I'm grateful for the 51 years I had with my Dad.

[slide 2]

Danny and I won the lottery by having two parents who loved us so much, so tirelessly. They both brought strong, equally positive, and in many ways complementary forces to the way they nurtured us, and I'm grateful for my Dad's hand in that, which prioritized our growth and development above everything else in his life.

[slide 3]

I'm grateful for how he supported all of our crazy entrepreneurial schemes, and there were a lot of them, and how he forgave our mischief, which was significant.

I'm grateful for all the bike trips along Lakeshore Boulevard in Toronto and Lake Shore Drive in Chicago,

For Ontario Place, Marineland, Disneyland, Canada's Wonderland.

[slide 4]

For Rome and London and Jerusalem, but also for Mississauga and Barrington

For so many baseball games and road trips and bread bowls and jazz shows and casinos.

I'm grateful for countless turkeys and turkey trots,

I'm grateful for the many times Dad got me out of difficult spots, especially in the darkest parts of my young adulthood.

I'm grateful he joined me on the multi-decade adventure that was our internet dictionary company, which brought us both purpose and meaning as collaborators, while literally bringing meaning to millions of people on the Web.

[slide 5] I'm grateful he retired early to our lifelong vacation spot and built up a network of supportive friends in Hilton Head and here in Bluffton.

[slide 6]

I'm grateful he found love twice in his life, I'm grateful that he met Eileen and built a whole new world together of adventure and laughter and joyful grandkids. And I'm grateful that by meeting Eileen he connected Danny and me with a sprawling and accomplished step-family. Finally, I'm grateful that Dad got to know and got to share so much of his love with the one I love over the past 4 years.

Now, let's go a little deeper in a few different dimensions of Dad.

The Buddy

[slide 7]

My dad's love language was acts of service. He told me many times that what made him happy was to be useful to people, to his family, to his friends, to his community, and to the world at large. I'll start with the most trivial of examples.

He came to visit me in San Francisco about 15 years ago, in the years after Mom died but before he'd met Eileen. I had just recently moved to the apartment where Yong and I now live. I had complained to him one evening that I was never able to get the picture windows totally free of streaks. The next day I stumbled out of my room to find him out on the balcony washing the windows with crumpled up newspapers and some homebrew potion he'd made while I was sleeping. He advised me that using paper towels, as I'd been doing up to that point, was a fool's errand because the fibers shed and cause streaks, and then gave me a lesson about evaporation rate and how it influenced the best time of day to clean the windows.

That was a really momentous Dad visit for me, not because he cleaned all my windows, but because of what came after that.

[slide 8]

Here we are in a jazz club in San Francisco and at a huge record store near my place during that same weekend. We later went wine tasting in the Napa valley north of San Francisco. While we were driving around looking for a winery when he told me he had started online dating. We pulled off the road.

Not a subject I ever imagined I'd discuss with my Dad. Up to that moment we'd mostly talked about computers and stocks, so this conversation was an abrupt upgrade. After telling me about his dating frustrations – because, again, he hadn't yet met Eileen – I responded in kind. He had been so vulnerable with me, I felt I had to reciprocate and share my own recent dating experiences, not to mention two decades of relationship history he was totally unaware of. I was nervous about that conversation but I needn't have been. The information may have been new to my Dad but it was not entirely surprising, he assured me, and he wanted, above all, my happiness. In hindsight I can see that Dad had made it a priority on that trip, from the start, to let me know how much he loved me.

The Engineer

[slide 9]

If my parents are reincarnated as school supplies, my Mom is now a dictionary and my Dad is now a periodic table. One had a love for language and the other a love for science. You might say Danny and I ended up doing work at the intersection of these fields. It's because both my Mom and Dad were equally great about indulging our hobbies and interests. Maybe a little too great, because at least for me my interests changed every week, and I think my brother has a similar story. The one hobby that really stuck for me came after my Dad brought home this beauty,

[slide 10]

an original Apple II computer. It was 1980 and I was, like, 6. The computer was an endless source of wonder to me and as Danny knows I barricaded myself in my room for much of the next decade. But actually, what my Dad did later had an even bigger impact than bringing home that computer. While I was in high school he brought me in to meet some of his researchers at Desoto.

[slide 11]

DeSoto was a paint and coatings company and my Dad was the head of research and development, and he was a very forward-thinking guy so he had people working not just on paint and coatings, but on a variety of new initiatives that might transform the industry.

[slide 12]

The guys he introduced me to were doing computer-aided design on these workstations that were way more powerful than anything I'd seen before. They were working on processes that my Dad described as 3D printing – this sounded like science fiction in the 1980s, so I barely believed him that it was possible. And his group contributed some of the earliest patents on this technology.

Later when I was trying to figure out a major in college, that experience loomed large in my decision – my Dad had shown me that it was possible to do fulfilling and cutting-edge work with computers. Computer science was not a sexy degree at the time, but I figured that if a computer science degree could get me a job working for someone like my Dad, it can't be all that bad.

The entrepreneur

[slide 13]

Dad was a co-conspirator in my business ideas really since the 1980s, when I would sell banners and greeting cards to neighbors printed on our highly exclusive dot matrix printer. When I wrote PC puzzle games in the early 90s he sent floppy disks to all the customers who sent in shareware registration fees. Then, in 2000, we incorporated a company called Datamuse that makes educational websites and apps. I did the technical work, and he handled all the finance and back-office stuff, since I couldn't be bothered with any of that. Datamuse gave us a connection to each other in the two languages we spoke in common, technology and finance, and that connection endured and strengthened over a quarter century. There aren't really any photos that capture my Dad's involvement in Datamuse, so I've chosen to include one of his

quarterly reports here. My Dad would send out the quarterly reports reliably the day after every quarter ended, and, when you consider that he was involved for 24 years, that ended up being nearly 100 quarters.

[slide 14]

Besides the administrative work, Dad also did customer support, replying to the users who emailed us from the websites, which amounted to several thousand emails over the decades – I'd estimate about 8,000. To give you a sense of how much work that was, let me give you one very typical example, which is this reply to a guy who wrote in asking for help about OneLook, which was our bigger website in the 2000s. Imagine this level of care repeated 8000 times. I'd be cc'd on all of these emails, and over time I started noticing that my Dad would sign some of his emails "G'Day". Later I realized he was doing this whenever he figured out that the user writing in was from Australia, which sometimes required some technical sleuthing to do.

[slide 15]

Looking back I see that he did this hundreds of times. It seemed a little corny at first, but since his death I've heard from a few people who read the obituary and remarked to me how touched they were to get this level of personal care from a website's feedback form, which is all too rare.

[slide 16]

While we're on the topic of his work ethic.

The family had a tradition of meeting in a different city every year on Father's Day. One year in the 2000s it was New York City. In between touristy things, we went to the Fifth Ave Apple Store, I think it wasn't too long after it opened so it was kind of a tourist attraction in its own right. Dad figured out that you could change the browser home page on all the display models of the computers in the store, and the change would stick. So he went around with me changing all of them so that the home page was OneLook.com, and for a while that Apple store was transformed into a big, inescapable gauntlet of advertisements for our website. These days the computers in the Apple store are a bit more locked down and I don't think customers can change the browser home page. I like to think we had something to do with that.

The Citizen

[slide 17]

During his chemo sessions my Dad and I went through an archive of old newspaper articles I had found online and, among lots of other fascinating stuff, we found some articles he wrote from when he was the president of the Hilton Head Island computer club.

[slide 18]

This one from the 90s talks about his evangelism of the Internet, which was new and exciting at the time. He was helping to get people here online even back when online meant dialup. At the computer club, and well beyond his tenure there, he made it his single-minded mission to simplify and secure the electronic lives of his lowcountry peers. He was probably a bigger Google evangelist than I was. If you said certain keywords to him, you might inadvertently get a well-researched lesson on the benefits of Chromebooks, Youtube TV, or Android.

[slide 19]

In that same newspaper archive, we found about a dozen spicy letters to the editor he'd written to the papers in Hilton Head and Bluffton over 30 years. Let me walk you through some of the headlines.

Petition for tax cap

Temporary taxes tend to become permanent

Nothing so fun to spend as someone else's money ("Find something else to annoy us, or get a hobby!")

The money is already there

Proposed road tax poses unnecessary risk

Notice a theme? You might think that My Dad had a very particular agenda in regard to his letters to the editor. But it wasn't all about local taxes! This one is my favorite:

[slide 20]

To The Packet: We're glad to see that the Packet is starting a Saturday edition. Just wanted you to know. Harvey Beeferman

[slide 21]

I visited South Carolina every Thanksgiving, and the same routine played out every year: Like clockwork in late October Dad would email me to ask if I'd like to do the Turkey trot with him, and I'd say yes, and I'd arrive the night before Thanksgiving and we'd go to the Turkey trot early the next morning and take this photo after the race.

[slide 22]

Here are the 7 years I could find the photos for. One year, I think it was 2018ish, Dad accidentally flipped our ages when he signed me up and I ended up winning the men's 70+ division.

The Romantic

[slide 23]

Here's a very special email Danny and I received in 2013.

[slide 24]

[...Eileen email...]

I'd spent a lifetime being motivated in good part by approval from my Dad but the truth was he sought approval from us too. Over the subsequent years he'd send me photos of his travels and adventures with Eileen.

[slide 25]

When he said that he was going to Costa Rica and planned to go ziplining, I thought maybe his account had been hacked. As far as I had known he hadn't ever done anything more adventurous than buying stocks on margin.

13 years of adventure with Eileen followed. I can't count the number of times Dad turned to me during that time, and especially in the past year during Eileen's superhuman level of caregiving, and said, "Isn't she great?". The answer to that, Dad, is yes, a thousand times yes.

[slide 26]

One last photo. This one was taken just a couple of years ago, at Dad's 80th birthday party, as he walked into a house filled with his friends and family – some of you are there in the back.

When I'm sad the past few weeks it's helped me to think about the support and love you all gave back to him over the years. I hope my Dad's memory may be a blessing to you as it is to me.

[\(Click here for the printable Celebration of Life booklets, a brief quiz on Dad's life!\)](#)