

from the editor

On August 22, 2013 my father, Thomas Laird died in his home in New Britain, Pennsylvania. My sister Suzy, his brother Rich and I were all by his side when he passed. On September 7th we held a memorial service for him at Doylestown Presbyterian Church, his church for forty-five years. His service was a real celebration of his life. He had insisted that we should play Dixie-land Jazz music, as he was a fan, and he wanted everyone to rejoice that he was with now with his Lord in heaven. Dr. Jerry Rife's Rhythm King's, who perform hymns and spirituals in the Dixie-land style, played during the 30 minutes prior to the start of the service, and set a joyful tone in what is usually a stoic situation. People actually clapped as they finished each number. During the service we sang some of his favorite hymns, as he always really enjoyed that part of his faith. Suzy, brother Rich, a friend from church-Mary Schull, and I all spoke about his life. Common themes were his love of scripture, his many, many friendships and his warm, welcoming, and fun loving personality. Jerry and his band played a rousing and upbeat version of "How Great Thou Art," full of soaring solos and a huge finish. After a final hymn, the band led the crowd out of the sanctuary, playing "When the Saints Go Marching In" and we marched down the street to the church's fellowship hall for a reception. This is how dad had always said he wanted his service to end-marching to "Saints." Afterwards we had so many people comment on the service, saying that they really enjoyed the celebratory feel and the upbeat music. It was a perfect tribute and a sad, but wonderful day.

The following are the words I spoke in remembrance of my father:

First of all, I would like to send my very heart-felt thanks for all the love, support and caring that has been expressed and shown to myself, Suzy and our family during the last few weeks. The amount and depth of the kind words, thoughtful remembrances and expressions of love has been almost overwhelming.

I have been left almost speechless by the reaction to my father's passing. I have received cards from and spoken with people I did not know and had never met before, as well as old friends, who have repeated the same sentiments over and over again- "Tom was like family to us."

My father always talked about

wanting this day, his memorial, to be a celebration. He said this repeatedly throughout his life for as long as I can remember; that he imagined this day to be full of joyful music and praise. A day to celebrate his life and revel in his passing on, where he would be united with his Lord in heaven. So let's honor that wish today. Let's celebrate Tom's life.

Of course it is sad when we lose a loved one. Of course we will miss Tom and his passing will leave a hole in my heart and my life. But we can also laugh, sing praises and share our many fond memories. We can exalt his life, a life that he lived in his own way. A life that was full of grace, faith, fun, and good friends.

Tom Laird lived a good life and he was a good man. He was committed to his family, to Betsie, his wife of almost fifty years, to his church and his faith and to his friends and his community. He was a business man, who tried and succeeded on several occasions, and who tried and failed on several more. He was a good boss, an excellent teacher, and a wonderful role model. He loved to joke and laugh and had a good sense of humor. He had a way of making almost everyone feel welcome and cared about. He was loyal, he was trusting, and he was very giving.

I have been touched by the tremendous outpouring of affection that has been shown towards my father. As we brought him home from the hospital and entered into hospice care, and as he passed away, the number of people who expressed their love and caring for Tom has been overwhelming. From those that I knew were his closest friends to his neighbors, his acquaintances at church, and the people he did business with—all expressed the same thing; heart-felt loss at his passing. It really has been remarkable to see and hear about the impact my father had in the world and the people he came in contact with.

I have many fond memories of my dad. When I was a young boy, of getting out of church early on Sunday mornings and going to Philadelphia Eagles games-stopping for donuts on the way and getting hotdogs from the same vendor outside the stadium every time. When I was a young man, of working together and learning from him-how to treat your customers, your employees and everyone else you deal with. And as a man myself, as I was finding my own way and values in the world, of his willingness to put aside our differences and welcome my viewpoints and life choices.

I want to share a couple of things that I have learned from my father and how he has helped make me the man that I am today.

He taught me about how to treat others:

It's OK to stop on your way out of a restaurant after a meal and say thank you to the wait staff. It is especially OK to ask to speak to the manager of any establishment and tell them that the service you received was especially good.

It is OK to go out of your way to greet someone new and try to help them feel comfortable and welcome. Or even someone you don't know at all and strike up a conversation just to be friendly.

It's OK to treat business acquaintances like friends. I was recently speaking with my Dad's insurance agent who told me that "Your father has been stopping in our office every few months, for the last...12 or 15 years or so." His insurance agent! It's good to look someone you are doing business with in the eye and let them see your face. It helps builds trust and it builds a relationship.

He taught me about sports-being a fan and watching games together was always an important part of our life:

Always root for the home team and always root for the underdog, which as a Philadelphia fan was often the same thing!

Never leave a sporting event early. One time when I was young, probably around eight or nine we were at one of those Eagles game and they were just getting killed, again. I was cold and tired and wanted to go home. Dad convinced me we should stay and, no the Eagles didn't make a miraculous comeback. But after the other team scored, again, the Eagles took the resulting kickoff and ran it all the way back for a touchdown. One of the most exciting plays you can see in a game and one I'm not sure I had ever seen before—certainly I had never seen the Eagles do that! As we left the stadium I marveled at what I had witnessed in the final moments of that game and my dad explained that that is why he never leaves a game early, no matter what. And I still try follow that rule; never give up hope, because something really good just might happen.

And he taught me about how to survive in life:

It's OK to be competitive. If you are going to play, play to win. And it's OK to gloat a little when you win, you should enjoy the moment. But also follow the rules. And most of all, try to

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Publisher and Managing Editor
Scott Laird
503-367-0098
scott@vernoniasvoice.com

Contributors

Chip Bubl
Tobie Finzel
Bill Haack
Sally Harrison
Jill Hult
David Spackman
Sonia Spackman

Photography

Ilene Grady
Scott Laird

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One year subscriptions
(24 issues) \$35

Vernonia's Voice is published
on the 1st and 3rd Thursday
of each month.

Vernonia's Voice, LLC
PO Box 55
Vernonia, OR 97064
503-367-0098

www.VernoniasVoice.com

have fun.

And-It is OK to laugh at yourself and your failures. We can't always be winners. When things are not going well, laugh at your misfortune, then pick yourself up and try again. Things always get better.

My father was a man of great faith. He was a caring, generous, gracious and loyal man. He was a man who valued his many, many friendships, his business relationships, and his family connections. He was a man who stood by his many principles and beliefs. He was a man who could brighten your day with a kind word, with his smile or laugh, or just by showing you he cared.

I have one final story that I would like to share with you. On his final day, his brother Rich and Suzy and I were with him, and we felt like he was really suffering and having difficulty letting go. Suzy sent out an email request

continued on page 20

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