

Talking about Dad – November 26, 2016

On behalf of my Mom and my wife, Cyndi, thank you so much for being here this weekend to remember my dad. He was an incredible man.

First, you are all invited to join us at the VFW for lunch after the graveside service. It's at 2106 Vine St. We want to spend time with you and continue the wonderful, wonderful outpouring of love permeating this week.

I originally planned to talk about my relationship with dad. Share about how missing the last chance to talk to my Grandpa Beilman before his death, and my boss Greg Reid advising me to call my parents daily because I wouldn't be able to someday led to the joy of phoning my parents to tell them I loved them nearly daily for years.

I changed my mind Monday.

Throughout the week, we have been overwhelmed by the outpouring of love and memories about dad. As family, former co-workers, and friends shared their impressions in person, by phone, and online, we realized how much love was surrounding us. The phrase, #SurroundedByLove, and its impact consoles us during this challenging time.

Because of all those remembrances, I want to share three comments from you that describe my dad incredibly well.

ONE ENTITY (DAVE BROWN)

Dave Brown (no relation) was the boss Cyndi and I had for student activities at Fort Hays. During those years, Dave knew dad and mom (and loved to come over on Thursday - cleaning day - to drive mom crazy). Several years ago, he was back in Hays on a business trip, and went to dinner with them. Dave messaged this week, saying, "I know how very much she and Bernie had become almost a single entity."

How very true.

While my dad was in the limelight, he would tell you he couldn't have accomplished anything without my mom. It was amazing to experience two people - different in so many ways - who so effectively complemented each other. From the age of three when dad first kissed mom – always the sales guy trying to close a sale a little too soon – to their marriage of 63 years, they have been partners in helping so many people. In recent years, their partnership became more competitive with daily Scrabble games. On each day's call, dad would report how many games they played, and how badly mom trounced him. Even amid all those defeats, the love and mutual sacrifice between the two of them never wavered.

Everyone has been so kind, asking what they can do to help now. My answer springs from their partnership: Pray for dad, Pray for mom to make it through all the challenges ahead for her without him. And if you're up for a tough game of Scrabble, give mom a call. She's looking for Scrabble victims, I mean partners.

FAMILY – KATHY OCHS

Mom's cousin, Kathy Ochs, put on Facebook that Dad's "devotion to family, no matter which family, was phenomenal. I will never forget all those wonderful holiday gatherings" at Professor Pittewursts, our restaurant.

What might seem odd in many families seemed normal for us. There never seemed to be "in-law" labels attached to anyone. There were no "second or third" cousins – only cousins. I've heard multiple mentions this week of cousins thinking my mom and dad were their aunt and uncle because my folks were treated like a sister and brother by their parents.

Joe Weigel – "Ever since I can remember, I had 2 grandmas, 1 grandpa, 2 aunts, 1 uncle, 6 cousins, and Phyllis Bernie and Mike."

My parents didn't fit into traditional family categories. Many people avoid fitting into categories by being over the top. Dad and mom were exactly the opposite, following Jesus' admonition to never take the seat of honor. They took the lowest place – through humility and service to anyone in the family.

When someone needed help, the natural choice was calling Bernie to see what he thought or could do.

It didn't matter whether you were a Brown, a Brungardt, a Beilman, a Billinger, or a Scott or Diehl, or a Young or Vanatta.

After Cyndi and I married, a closeness developed between my folks and Pat Young, Cyndi's mom. When Pat was in the hospital here in Hays, Dad and Mom would visit her and report back. And just the other night, Pat insisted on talking with mom to see how she was doing following dad's death, and then told our nephew Nathan Vanatta, he WOULD BE getting off work to be here today.

BOSS – FRIEND – MENTOR (SUNELL KOERNER)

Finally, multiple people Dad worked with mentioned that while he was the boss, he was more. He was a mentor, a teacher, a jokester, and a friend - when they worked with him and beyond.

Sunell Koerner said, "Your dad was such a great boss and a very good friend as well. And such a great story teller! Bernie will always be known as one of the very best."

Dad loved the people he worked with. Well, he loved most of the people he worked with. Those that he didn't love were usually the ones he thought had unwarranted high opinions of themselves. Those people he poked fun at – incessantly.

Dad never believed in the fast, cheap, and easy way to success. For him it was about hard work, very conservative risk taking, and doing right by people – even when they didn't necessarily deserve it.

From spending so much time hanging around the television station with him, I hope his business smarts wore off on me. I'm going to need them because now I can't call him for advice about what to do.

MY DAD

In 2009, Bernard was in the hospital for 10 weeks, dodging death three times. He was finally released the Friday before Father's Day.

On Mother's Day, I rushed home to find him in ICU, and the doctor said this was potentially it. The first time I visited him the next morning, he was unresponsive. When I visited two hours later, he nearly squeezed my hand off. That Monday evening, he was off the ventilator and watching Dancing with the Stars.

Sunday night, when I thought he was nearly gone, I went home and wrote this. It was going to be his eulogy. I gave it to him for Father's Day that year and said there are probably very few people that ever get read their own eulogy . . .

My Dad

My dad is my dad.

He's a son, a husband, and a big brother to many – whether or not he's older or even a sibling.

He's a Kansan.

He's a friend.

He's a partner with Jesus.

He is loved by so many people.

My dad is a barber. He's a salesman, broadcaster, TV celebrity, and announcer. He's a chef and restaurateur. He's a board member, advisor, and mentor.

My dad is an electrician, plumber, mechanic, gardener, carpenter, house painter, collector, comedian, impressionist, artist, and Scrabble player.

I've seen him fix all kinds of things for people.

For those in genuine need, he's a bank, a financier, and investor.

Hard working and strategic; a solver and critic.

He has a distinctive personality. He's a learner and advice giver.

My dad is tech savvy, following me into blogging and tweeting.

He's incredibly proud of his son.

My dad's a positive thinker and struggling. He's sweet and rebellious.

A coach and cheerleader, with a cantankerous, opposing voice.

He loves sports; hates athletic ineptitude. That's why he's a frustrated golfer and Kansas City sports fan.

He's demanding and a loving, supportive man; big hearted and skeptical.

He's a confidant who is inquisitive (at times nosy), and doesn't take any BS from anyone.

He is infirmed, and he looms large.

My dad is a rock, a fighter, and seemingly to me, invincible.

My dad is my dad.