

## **Memorial Remarks October 2, 2021**

**Written by Todd Corham**

**Delivered by Jean Cohen**

Disclaimer: "The views expressed herein are not necessarily those of this reader. Nor of Dad, nor the family nor of this church. Nor especially this denomination."

That said, I feel that my brother, Todd, captured very well who Dad is, in our hearts and minds. Todd planned to be with us today. However, his mother-in-law, Hilda Ramos, passed away last week. Sadly, yet another loving soul has left us.

My brother Writes:

My father was trouble.

He mellowed just a bit as he got older, but in his prime, he was an agitator, a rabble-rouser, a scofflaw, a co-conspirator and I even suspect at times a "person-of-interest." But the people interested in him, those he agitated and the laws at which he scoffed were deeply flawed, even wrong, and his contrarian views have generally proved correct, ... and right ... and just. Civil rights, the environment, the antiwar and anti-nuclear movements, the farm workers' rights. And did I say the environment? All were great causes, although all seem to be never-ending. He was a bit late on the women's movement, but we'll touch on that in a bit.

As we gather today to remember Dad, we will tell stories of our experience with him, the things he said to us, the things he did, the memories we'll carry of his time with us. He had lots of stories of his own, but there are many more in which he figured, and those are the ones that are most vivid for me. The things that Dad did, rather than the things he said, will have the most staying power.

Growing up, Dad gave me remarkably little guidance, which is probably why I turned out the way I did. That's my excuse, anyway. No guidance on personal finance, relationships, a bit on conflict resolution, not much on athletics. Less than nothing on careers, certainly. Yet looking back, he offered a great deal of guidance for me through his personal actions. Dad's medium, at least for me, was dramatization.

The fact is that I didn't hear him preach that much growing up, because he wasn't regularly in the pulpit. (Pause) Of course I also didn't go to church. But he could tell a story, and he could live an example, and that's what preaching is, for many. He was really funny and loved the ironic. I might go so far as to say that, for me, he left behind parables in his actions, living out the messages he wished to send. The parable of the camp site. The parable of the kayak. The parable of the adopted child. The parable of the Doo Dah Parade. The parable of the "Troubled Lebanese exchange student." Don't ask.

So like the apostles struggling to interpret the parable of the scattered seeds, we are left to decode the actions of this man and draw out the teachings he imparted. That's really his legacy for me. What Dad did matters much more than what he said. I think that's true for most people. Another disclaimer: Everyone's interpretation of his actions will be different depending on the impact. (Todd wrote that. Hold up the paper and show them.)

There was a dichotomy to Dad. He loved science, and yet he believed in God, which is not uncommon. He believed in God, but also in UFOs. That's more of a reach. He was a lover of metrics and facts, and yet had pet conspiracy theories. He loathed inequity in the greater world and so worked tirelessly for civil rights, but as I mentioned, the early women's movement evaded him. I'm pretty sure that movement had its origins in his first marriage. Mom was a colleague and friend of Jane Fonda and embraced the movement early. Those influences were sudden and deep. Dad once lamented to me that, like any nascent movement, "it lacked a sense of humor."

For all of the import his actions carry for me, I will also remember his voice, his stories, his laughter. My God could he laugh! Many of you know that Dad was not a great singer. In fact, some might say he was a man completely unfettered by the shackles of musical convention. And he sang with gusto. "Rock of Ages," "The Navy Hymn," "You are My Sunshine," all succumbed to Dad's particular voice and we loved him for that. Of course, on those rare occasions when he was in the pulpit with the microphone in front of him, all had the opportunity to share in that experience.

William Sloan Coffin, a congregational minister at Riverside Church when I was a member there, said, "You must love the good, but you must also hate the bad,

otherwise you're just sentimental." That's a good description of Dad. He was not sentimental in that sense. He REALLY did hate the bad. That's a tall order. That's a life sentence. That is a calling to which he was called every single day. That's what made him "trouble" for those he disagreed with.

During a talk with Paul Kittlaus about a dozen years ago, Paul asked Dad to offer a prayer as they sat down to lunch. Having just stated that Dad was better at demonstrating that expressing, I'd like to close with his prayer from that day. It seems particularly apt for this day.

"Lord, we thank you for the day, for the experiences that we're recollecting today. We thank you that you've guided us through the years, that you've kept us alive, that you've called us in one way or another to be focused on the kingdom. And we thank you for the collegiality and the friendships that have sustained us through the years. We ask your blessing on this project, that there can be some socially redeeming outcomes to our efforts to describe what's happened for future generations. Keep us safe on the road. In Jesus' name. Amen."

I (Jean) would just like to add one sentence to that:

Papa, if love could have saved you, you would have lived forever.