

Goodbye, Dad

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By David Bond

Wallace, Idaho – My father, Richard Milton Bond, slipped the hook this morning. Had he lived another month he would have been 94 but given his failing health, I would not have wished that on him.

The whole family, even we kids, called him Dickie and he never minded. He had a raucous laugh, an even greater sense of humour and greater than that, a spirit for adventure and a disdain for bullshit.

He had a pilot's heart and a disdain for common thinking. Linus Pauling taught him freshman chemistry at Cal-Tech, whence he transferred with the V-12 program to Berkeley, where he met my late mother, Patty, while both were on the student council.

Our family started in Santa Barbara, where Dickie got his advanced flying tickets on the GI Bill, then moved to Philadelphia where he worked for Ingersoll, the company that made Mickey Mouse watches (amongst many more important things), then to Great Falls, then Spokane, where he built our house, then back to San Francisco.

He found himself unwillingly embroiled in the California politics of Edmund G. Brown (Jerry's dad) at the Calor Gas Co. and took his fledgling family to the unknown town of Nanaimo, British Columbia, where he assumed the manager's job of the Vancouver Island Gas Company at a severe cut in pay and opportunity. This, all by the time I was six years old.

Vi-Gas, as it was known, was a marvel. It took barged-in natural gas from the Vancouver mainland, re-compressed it and shot it out through the local pipelines. One of Dickie's goals had been to build a gas pipeline from the mainland to the island, but the B.C. government, socialist at the time, wasn't having any of it unless one of its cronies could come up with an alternative. Nobody did.

But watching that gas plant with its giant turbines and pumps was a great joy to a little kid – plus there was a blackberry patch outside to die for in late summers.

Dickie taught me my love of flying. He had grown up on Stearmans and had access to, at various times, a Cessna 170, Cessna 180, Piper Comanche, and later, a Lake LA-4 amphibian, and he would always let me drive. Needless to say I dashed to flight school at a certain legal age. He also taught us how to drive boats and water ski at high speeds.

He was a stern son-of-a-gun, too, Marine that he was. Discipline was no further away than his fraternity paddle – which endured an untimely death when younger-brother Marc and I found where he hid it, and took it down to the beach over an open fire.

He laughed like crazy over our stunt, but promptly cut another one, used it, and it remains hidden to this day.

When we returned to Spokane in my mid-teens, Dickie gave Tom Foley a run for his money for the U.S. Congress in 1968. We lost by a nickle, it was a nasty close race on both sides, but Foley had the kind grace to appoint brother Marc to the Air Force Academy a few years later. Dickie later served a dozen years in the Washington State Legislature, so not too bad of a finish, all the way around.

What else can you say about a Dad who gave you a Huck Finn childhood? In our early years in Nanaimo we didn't live fancy; powdered milk and rice puffs for breakfast, a two-mile hike to school and bologna for lunch. It didn't seem odd or poor to us. In fact, it seemed like a great life to we little kids. We had a beach and hot-dogs. What more could a little kid need?

Perhaps there is another thing. When last we saw each other 18 months ago in Anchorage, we had a good chuckle over memories and I got to thank him for being a great Dad, and he told me he loved me. That's hard for a Marine to do. So maybe, just maybe, have the same conversation with your parents, before it's too late.

Dickie, Semper Fi. You were one helluva Dad.