

## 4.4 John D. Rapalje, Jr.



**Sorbet**

**Leatherwood Dahlias**

**Maggie Valley/Waynesville, North Carolina**

**Psalm 24: 3 - 4**

**Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord?**

**Who may stand in his holy place?**

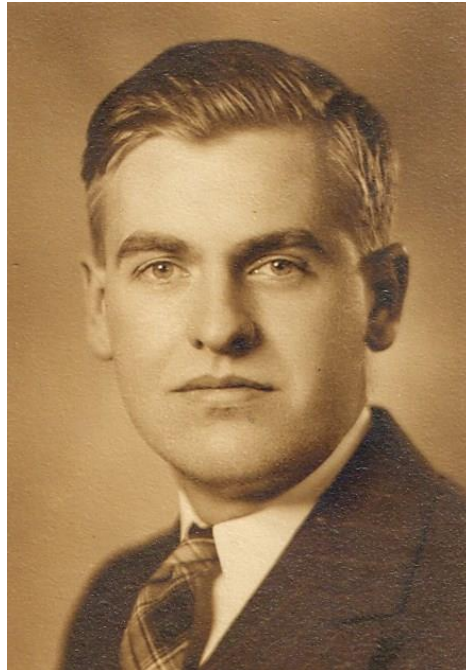
**The one who has clean hands and a pure heart,  
who does not trust in an idol  
or swear by a false god.**

# **John D. Rapalje, Jr.**

**August 17, 1916 – July 22, 1999**

by Dr. and Mrs. Robert J. Rapalje

March, 2021



**Let me tell you about MY DAD! I was blessed to have had a father who was a really GOOD man. Dad was born in Harrington, Delaware in 1916, but his family came from Long Island, New York. In about 1920, the family moved back to Long Island. He had no brothers or sisters, and he lost his parents when he was young, his mother in 1935 and father in 1940, but he did have some wonderful aunts and cousins that we were blessed to know. When I was a child growing up in Florida, I remember Dad's aunts telling me, "Your Dad is a GOOD man! When you grow up, you try to be like him!!" I have spent my life with this advice as my goal in life!**

**Dad graduated from Drexel Institute of Technology in 1940, after working to put himself through college. While in college, he had a vision of a "dark-haired woman across the river." That dark-haired woman turned out to be our Mom, Emma Marie Maytrott of Vineland, NJ, now fondly remembered by her family as "Grandma Bunny!" They were married for 54 years, during which time (you probably won't believe this!) they NEVER had a fight! My siblings and I can**

confirm that we NEVER saw them argue, nor hardly ever disagree, about anything! That's because Mom always thought Dad was right! Dad and Mom were really in love! It was truly a marriage made in Heaven, and they set a wonderful example for all of us about how to have a very successful marriage and a GREAT family!

In 1946, when I was a year old, Mom and Dad moved from Vineland to Chicago. Dad used to say that they moved to Chicago because it was TOO COLD in New Jersey! Three years later, after the birth of Janet and Jim in Chicago, Dad drove his car into a snowbank. Soon after this, on October 12, 1949, we arrived in Florida, where Nancy was born! It was a LUCKY snowbank for me, because I would NEVER have found my Martha in Chicago!!

On my first day in Florida, we stayed at Three Lakes Lodge on Lake Eustis. It seems that I got away from my family just long enough to discover some ducks swimming on the lake. A few minutes later, I was found floating face down in the lake. It just happens that Dad had been a Boy Scout leader in New Jersey, teaching his scouts pressure-prone artificial respiration (before the discovery of CPR!). Dad gave me artificial respiration, revived me, and saved my life! As my aunts had been telling me, "Your Dad is a GOOD man . . . !"

I'll never forget a conversation I had with Dad one day when I was about 10 years old, that I should try to save money for my own college! "Someday you will need every cent you can get your hands on!" "Good grades are worth MONEY!" "Get good grades to get SCHOLARSHIPS and thus put yourself through college." This was ALL good advice that helped shape my life!

Dad LOVED TRAINS! Dad loved everything about trains, especially riding on them and taking pictures of them. We used to go to Leesburg (Atlantic Coast Line) and Wildwood (Seaboard Air Line) to take pictures of trains. We went to New Jersey on the train to visit our grandparents. In his retirement years, Dad and Mom were blessed with travel all over the country and Canada, of course, by train!

Dad loved the Methodist Church, where for years he served as church Lay Leader. In this capacity, he visited local churches, and frequently spoke in the services, especially on "Layman's Sunday." I will never forget one message he preached on Psalm 24, "Who shall ascend to the hill of the Lord?" Of course, the answer was "one who has clean hands and a pure heart." In his last year before he went

home to be with the Lord in 1999, Dad was in the hospital, and I was able to preach that message back to him. I remind Dad that “YOU can ascend the hill of the Lord, because YOU have clean hands and a pure heart, NOT because of anything WE have done ourselves, but because of what was done FOR us, by the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, the blood of Jesus.”

Dad loved to sing tenor! When I was a boy, I remember Dad sang tenor in a quartet in our Methodist Church. The song I remember most was called “For You I am Praying”: In this song, on the chorus, Dad had a solo for the first line, “For you I am praying,” then the rest of the song was sung in harmony parts. Mom and Dad used to sing a duet in church called “Transformed!” These songs still ring in my ears! I grew up LOVING harmony. When I was older, I LOVED to sing tenor with Dad in the church choir! He was SO good at singing, that with Dad sitting next to me singing in my ear, even I could sing tenor! Dad also sang in the SPEBSQSA (Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barbershop Quartet Singing in America!). I hope Dad is saving a seat for me next to him in Heaven! I understand there is a LOT of singing, a lot of harmony and worship going on over there!

In summary, Dad LOVED our Mom! He LOVED trains! He LOVED the Methodist Church! He LOVED the Lord, and he LOVED his family!

**“My Dad was a GOOD man—  
you try to be like him when you grow up!!”**

## **PART II**

July 22, 2019

Today marks exactly 20 years since Dad went home to be with the Lord! It was a special day for me, but not in the way I had thought and feared it would be. My story begins a LONG time ago. When I was a young teenager about 60 years ago, my greatest fear was that I might lose one or both of my parents. I used to lie on my bed and cry, agonizing over the possibility of such a loss.

This was understandable because we were blessed with GREAT parents! Mom and Dad were terrific parents. They brought us up in a Christian home, right across from the school and only two blocks from the church. I was the oldest of four children, two boys and two girls. We had moved to Florida when I was almost four years old because it was just TOO COLD in Chicago and New Jersey. On my first day in Florida on October 12, 1949, I nearly drowned in Lake Eustis. At that time, LONG before CPR and 911, Dad had been a Boy Scout leader, who had been teaching artificial respiration to his scouts. On that day, they found me floating face down in the lake! Dad gave me “artificial respiration,” (the one and only time he used this skill!) and saved my life! Since that day and before, Dad has been my HERO! He was then, he is now, and he always will be!!

Dad was a college graduate, which was pretty good for that time. He graduated from Drexel Institute of Technology in Philadelphia in 1940.. At a young age, Dad taught me the value of a good education, that I should go to college like he did when he spent 6 years working his way to a degree in Chemical Engineering. (BTW, Dad LOVED trains so much, I guess he always wanted to be an “engineer”!) Dad understood that, providing for a family of 6, he would not be able to afford college expenses for me. His words, “Someday you will need every cent you can get your hands on!” still ring in my ears! He taught me that good grades in school are MONEY in the bank in the form of scholarships. Also, at the age of 11, I got a paper route to earn money for college! Sure enough! I had good grades in school, and I had enough scholarships and summer jobs to put myself through four years of college—thanks to the newly established Lake Sumter Junior College!!

Our whole family attended church and Sunday School regularly. At one point five of us were singing in the choir! And, oh! In my college years, I just LOVED to sing tenor—next to MY Dad! From early childhood, I learned about my most

important hero, even more than the one who saved me from Lake Eustis and who sang tenor in my ear—the Lord Jesus Christ! I learned that God is a loving God, a God who is faithful, and merciful, promising to comfort us by the Holy Spirit in times of loss.

This brings us to July 21-22, 1999. Dad had had a stroke, but he had recovered and was back to delivering Mom's Sunday dinners to widows from the church. Then, sometime later, he began to have TSA's (mini-strokes). Dad had been in the hospital, where he needed a feeding tube, then to a rehabilitation center to gain strength so he and Mom could go to live with my sister Janet and her husband Fred. After a week or so of rehabilitation, he was looking forward to getting out of there to go to Janet's. On this particular day, he was very disappointed when the doctor told him that he was not strong enough to leave rehab.

That evening, someone in the rehabilitation center called and told us that we should come up to visit him. We don't know what they knew, or how they knew it, but something was going on. Martha, Philip, and I went to see him, and we met Mom there. Dad was uncomfortable, so the nurse gave him a rubdown, and we sang our favorite hymns to him that evening. Dad settled down, became comfortable, and fell asleep. Of course, Mom had no intention of going home, so she stayed with him. Because Philip had driven over, he was able to take Martha home, enabling me to stay with Dad and Mom.

Dad slept, and Mom and I dozed next to him, with Mom holding his hand on one side of him and me on the other side. There was a couch in the room, and Mom and I argued over which one of us should lie down on the couch. Neither of us did. I wondered if I should go home to get some rest for the next night, but fortunately I decided to stay. At about 5:00 in the morning, the charge nurse came in and checked on him. She turned on all the lights and told us that he was gone--with Mom holding his hand on one side of the bed, and me on the other side!

I think it was SO important that Mom be there with Dad at this moment. Equally important, I was able to be there with Mom, so she was not alone after Dad was gone! As Jesus was dying, there were TWO people that stood faithfully and prominently at the foot of the cross. There was Jesus mother Mary and the

beloved disciple John. The other disciples had fled in fear. But at the foot of the cross, when Jesus died, there were TWO, Mary and John, and they were not alone in that most difficult moment!

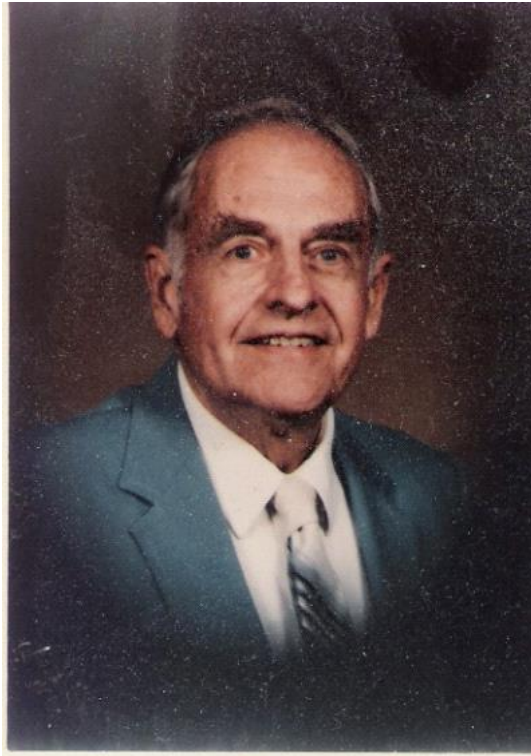
In the days that followed, I was so blessed to have Martha help me write a eulogy for Dad that I presented at his funeral. Fifteen years later we wrote another eulogy, this one for Mom. We were blessed to have the regular minister of the church out of town, giving us a better minister in David Lindsey to take over the service. The circumstances of Dad's passing and the comfort that I felt in this critical time made this experience, which as a teenager was my greatest fear, a high-water mark in my life!

Yes, Dad you are my Hero! You will always be!! I pray for my own sons, that the Lord will comfort them in this same special way, that YOU will be so real to them in that moment when MY days on earth are passed that they too can look back on that day and see a HIGH water mark in their lives!!

[Return to homepage](#)

**The following is the actual eulogy for John D. Rapalje, Jr.,  
prepared by Bob and Martha Rapalje  
and delivered by Bob  
on July 26, 1999,  
First United Methodist Church  
Tavares, Florida**

## IN MEMORIUM



**JOHN D. RAPALJE, JR.**

AUGUST 17, 1916 - JULY 22, 1999

I asked my Mom if I could say a few words at the service for Dad today. The problem is that there are just too many words to say about my Dad, and some of them are going to be hard to say. So I asked the Lord to show me which “few words” I should say and to help me say them. I wasn’t completely sure I could do this, but I wanted to try. As Dad’s oldest son, I’d like to share a few memories that I have of him.

During the last few years of his life, it was my privilege to work on a project with Dad that we called his “Memoirs.” It gave me a chance to summarize a few of the things that were important



to Dad, and to write them down for posterity. Even more importantly, it gave Dad and me something to talk about when we couldn't think of anything to say!

I guess the first topic should be trains. Did you notice that my Dad liked trains? Some might think he worked for the railroad, but as you probably know, he never did. Dad was not a paid salesman, but rather he was a satisfied customer! He liked to ride trains, watch trains, read about trains, photograph trains. He liked anything that had anything to do with trains. He never met a train he didn't want to ride. My Dad had a one TRACK mind. When we were kids we used to drive to Leesburg (Atlantic Coast Line) or Wildwood (Seaboard Air Line) on Sunday afternoons just to watch the trains come in. He had his camera and I had my little brownie camera, and we would take pictures of the trains. Every summer when we were growing up, we used to go visit relatives in New Jersey—it gave Dad an excuse to ride trains.

Most people do not realize that my Dad thought of the concept of an auto-train several years before the Auto Train that we have today. He thought of the idea of having special cars on a train to transport automobiles while the passengers rode in Pullman cars. Dad even drew up some plans and drawings, but I guess he didn't show it to the right people. He never got credit for his idea!

One more thought on trains, do you believe there are trains in heaven? Well, according to the Bible there are. Look at Isaiah

6:1. It says, "In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple." I'll bet Dad has already found that train!

Dad was a Boy Scout and a Boy Scout leader. In the Boy Scouts, back before the days of CPR, they used to teach "artificial respiration" to revive drowning victims. When he was a scout leader in Vineland, N.J. and later after we moved to Chicago, Dad was teaching this artificial respiration.

Then we moved to Florida on October 12, 1949. To this day, they still close the banks and the post office to commemorate our arrival in Florida! (It's Columbus Day!) On that day, I jumped from a dock into Lake Eustis after some ducks. I was not yet 4 years old, and I had never seen a lake before. The ducks looked like they were walking on it, so I thought I could too, I jumped in after them! Dan Winn, the owner of the Three Lakes Lodge where we were staying, and Dad found me in time and pulled me out. Dad did his artificial respiration on me. He said that he never did artificial respiration before or after that incident. He said that God gave that to him to use on me alone to save my life on that day.

Another important time in my life was when, in 1971 all four of us kids got married in the same summer. In the years following, since we all lived within a few miles of Tavares, Mom and Dad had Sunday dinner nearly every week. Before we sat down to dinner, Dad always had two or three dinners to deliver to shut-ins and widows in the community. This went on for 15 or 20

years. Then about 5 years ago, Dad had a stroke. But as soon as he was rehabilitated enough to get around, there we were, out delivering “meals on wheels” to shut-ins and widows again!

I gotta tell you, my Dad has always loved the Methodist Church! In his memoirs, he has names, pictures, ministers, and activities associated with the Methodist churches wherever he lived. He loved THIS Methodist Church most of all, and he was always talking about Leonard Chaffee’s Sunday School class. In his last days, the one thing that he wanted, besides going home from the hospital and nursing home, was to go back to Leonard Chaffee’s class! He really loved you all here at this church, and I thank you for your ministry to my Dad over the years!

I remember back to the old days in the old yellow brick Methodist Church on Alfred St. and Joanna Ave. I grew up in that church. I remember that Dad and I used to be responsible for mowing all the grass-and it was NOT a riding mower! He never took any money for it. We did the work just because we loved the Church.

I remember that since I was 11 years old, I used to have a paper route, where I earned \$5.00 per week. Now that I am a math instructor in the community college, I think back and remember that Dad taught me my first math problem. “What is 10% of \$5.00?” Dad taught me to tithe and give \$.50 each week in the offering.

I remember that Dad used to sing in a men’s quartet with Bill Burleigh, Bill Mursch, and Carl Duncan. My favorite song was

“For You I Am Praying!” On that last night before he passed away, we were singing hymns to him. That song was one of the songs that Mom, my wife Martha, and I sang to him in the nursing home on his last night.

My fondest memory in this church was when we sang in the choir here. I think at one time our whole family was in the choir. I always tried to be like Dad, so, of course, I tried to sing tenor like he did. I will never forget having Dad singing tenor in my ear! “Beneath the Cross of Jesus” was the first song I ever learned the tenor part.

When I was very young, I remember that Dad was a lay-leader. I will never forget the time about 35 years ago, he preached a sermon on Psalm 24. “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who can stand in his holy place? He that has clean hands, and a pure heart; who has not lifted up his heart unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.” What that meant is who can approach God? Considering the Holiness of God, who would dare to enter God’s presence?

So, three weeks ago when Dad was on the respirator and unconscious in the Critical Care Unit of the hospital, I was holding his hand, and I reminded him of that sermon that he preached 35 years ago. In fact, I preached it back to him, and I reminded him that he was ready to “ascend the hill of the Lord,” because his hands were clean and his heart was pure, cleansed by the Lord Jesus Himself! A few minutes later he opened his eyes and squeezed my hand. I was so surprised! When I came to myself,

I asked him, “Dad, do you want me to go get Mom?” Wow! What a dumb question!! Because of the ventilator, he couldn’t answer me, but he nodded his head, “Yes!” I ran to the waiting room to get Mom! What an unexpected blessing that was!

Dad has lived a good and successful life that we are celebrating today. On Thursday morning, my Dad finished his life on earth when the Lord called him home to be with Him. We who loved him so much are left behind. We still have work to do! When I was a small child, I can remember everybody used to tell me, “Your Dad is a really good man! When you grow up, you try to be like him!” Well, that’s good advice for young people everywhere, especially today! You be like MY Dad! He was a good man!! We were a blessed family to have him for our Dad!

[Return to homepage](#)