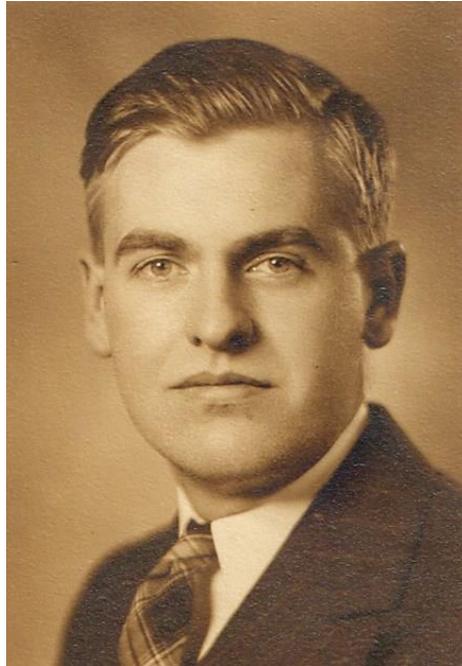


Let Me Tell You about MY DAD!

John D. Rapalje, Jr. (1916-1999)

by Dr. 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!!”

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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!!

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