

# **Snapshots of My Father's Life**

In memory of Gilbert Bettger

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## **Memories of a Loved One**

How do we remember a loved one?

Dates and places, jobs and possessions?

Maybe for some people that would do,  
but for my father, Gil, that doesn't ring true.

My father was a good man, a patient man,  
the type of man who was a friend to all.

Now that sufficient healing time has passed,  
my memories of him, I am ready to share.

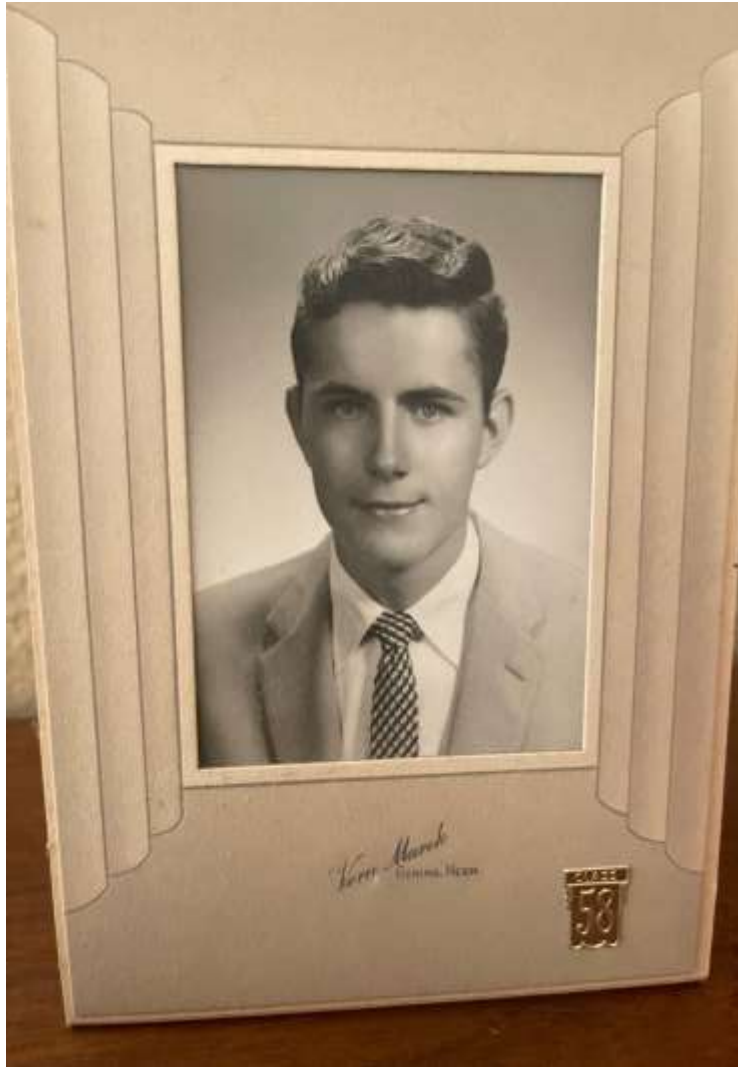
Some sad, but mostly happy, for he always  
saw sunshine through the clouds.

## Chapter 1: Childhood



### Family

Two brothers older, one brother younger, one sister older made this German family. My Dad's fond memories of playing baseball catch with his brother, listening to his father tell stories. Remembering his mother crying when his oldest brother went to war so far away. Like any mother, only his safe return home could comfort her.



### **Down by the River**

When you are young, a special job or chore, makes you feel older than your years. A consequential responsibility, the possibility of danger. The beginning of becoming a man. Riding a horse down by the South Platte River each evening to gather the cattle, set free to graze earlier in the day. A favorite memory, always told with a smile and far away gaze.



### **One Man's Treasure**

My own interest in watches,  
so often induced his story,  
of his first watch, pride and joy.  
Received from an aunt, a  
Mickey Mouse watch, the  
best gift ever.

To all you doubters, time  
travel is real. For when his  
birthday I found a watch  
with Disney's favorite mouse,  
my father was transported  
back in time 70 years.

## **Chapter 2: A Father**

### **Working Man**

Insurance salesman  
Teller at a bank  
Beef packing plant  
Carpet installer  
Carpet steam cleaner  
Drapery installer  
Always on time  
Always dependable  
Always trustworthy

Proudest moment  
was being the first  
non-family member  
to receive a key to  
the large furniture  
store and warehouse  
where he worked  
in Denver many years

### **Fun Times**

Playing slow-pitch softball.  
Playing football catch in the  
empty field beside our home.  
Coaching Little League and  
leading a Cub Scout troop.  
A surrogate father to many of  
my friends throughout his life.



“And be a simple kind of man  
Oh, be something you love and understand”  
-Lynyrd Skynyrd, Simple Man

Never saw my father wear a fancy shirt or a pull-over shirt.  
Said he was just not comfortable. A button-down plaid for him.

A fancy company Christmas party, bartender asks if he would  
like a glass for his beer. No, he said, the bottle will be just fine.

He tells us tonight he wants to make a very special dinner.  
We excitedly await something exotic from the Food Network.  
Proudly, he serves mashed potatoes, hotdogs, and sauerkraut.

If ever there were an award for being satisfied and content,  
my father would have won the Gold Medal. Never envious.



### **But You Can't Take the Farm out of the Boy**

So proud when his nephew drove the little red resurrected tractor in the Logan County Parade.

Always talking about the weather despite the fact that Southern California has no weather most days.

When asked to give directions, he would give detailed information using North, South, East and West.

He was always happy to see a Colorado license plate. "Maybe we know them or their family," he would say.





### **Always some advice**

Do you have enough gas?

Don't let it get below half!

Don't back up more than  
you have to.

Be careful.

Dad, I'm only going to the grocery store.

I know, but you gotta watch out for the other guy.  
News said there was a multi-car pile-up yesterday.

## Chapter 3: A Grandfather

### The Watcher

If his sons or grandchildren were participating in any event, you were sure to find my father in the stands.

Dad, what did you do today?  
I just went to the mall and watched the people go by.





### **The Artist**

A pencil, a box of colored pencils, and blank sheet of paper. He loved to draw cars, planes, animals, and farm yard scenes. "I drew this whole barn without a ruler," he proudly said. A drawing of a boat he named Ilena.

## Chapter 5: Doctors

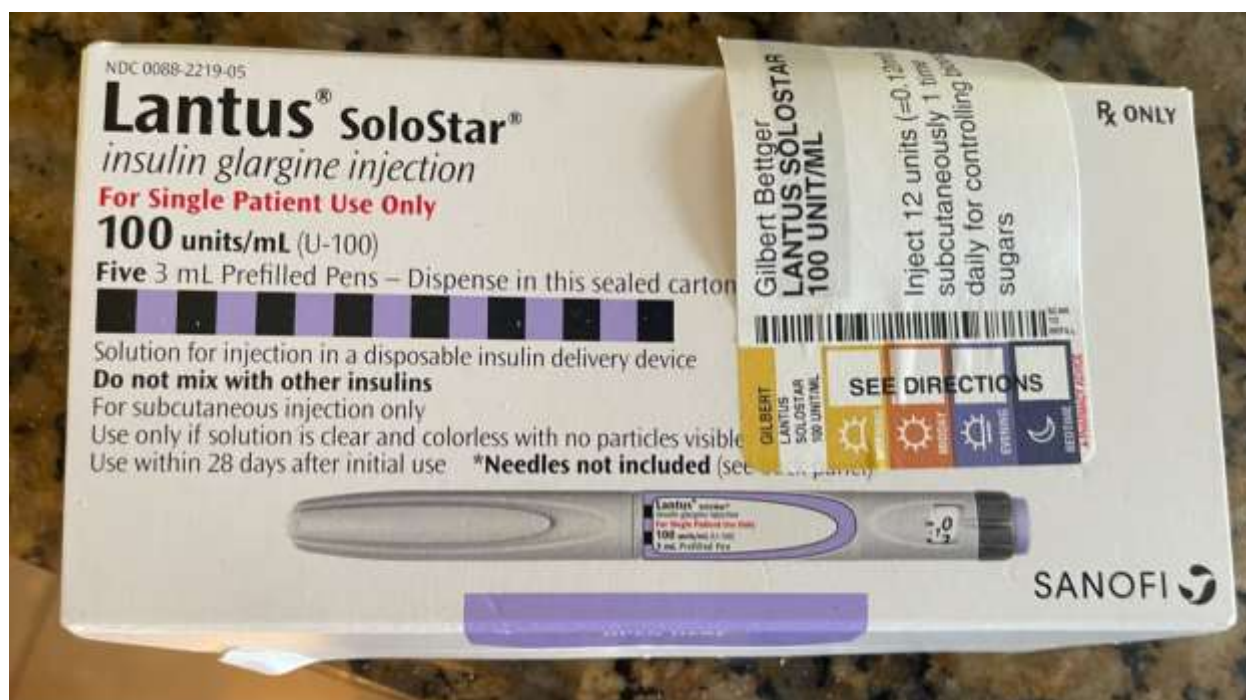
A local doctor told him he had six months to live, based on the condition of his fatty liver. But with the care of many excellent doctors, several surgeries, and a mountain of medication, he made it an additional twenty years.

### Not the Best Patient

Gave himself too much insulin one night, almost died.

While confined to a diet of pureed food, he asked, “Don’t you think it would be OK if I had just one candy bar today?”

The doctor asks, “Stick out our tongue and make the EEE sound for as long as you can while I look at your throat.” Apparently not understanding, my father screamed “Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee” as loud as he could, startling the doctor. 🤪





## The Daily Routine, Without Deviation

6:00am Oatmeal for breakfast,

9:00am Snack

11:00am Lunch,

2:00pm Snack

5:00pm Dinner

7:00pm Wheel of Fortune

7:30pm Jeopardy

8:00pm Snack

Midnight Applesauce

“Dad, why do you always watch Wheel of Fortune and Jeopardy?”

“To keep my mind sharp.”

## Chapter 6: It Gets Real

After returning from the hospital with a broken leg, my father required round the clock care. All of this during Covid. Because his voice became weaker, we gave him a whistle. Luckily, he did not need to use it often for emergencies, but it was used often.

“Help! My TV control is not working! I push and nothing happens.”

“I think its snack time. Some pudding would be good.”

“The Padres lost again! They can’t hit worth a darn!”



**After breaking his leg, my  
Dad is making great  
progress recovering!  
Thanks to his excellent  
PT Rainer!**

## The Good Son

I am awake.

Should I say it's very early or late?

For sure an hour I've learned to hate.

Awake because a great idea grows?

Awake reflecting on the day's woes?

No, because my father is awake,

and by himself he cannot be awake.

I am now very awake.

With this empty time, let me see,

a great son I have always tried to be.

Didn't complain and did my chore,

always a great son to my core.

Time increased the debt, stay awake,

because his aged body remains awake.

I am still awake,

because I heard his call

and cannot let him fall.

This debt with increasing effort I pay,

and so here my body I lay.

Tired and drowsy yes, but clearly awake,

as long as he needs me, I will be awake.

## THE WAITING

Sitting in a hospital room  
like an airport gate, stuck.  
The big board informs, the flight is delayed,  
not yet cancelled, not yet rescheduled.  
Feeling trapped and enclosed, going  
back home is not an option.  
I dare not wander far  
in case my name, they call.  
No place to sit comfortably,  
no way to relax.  
Surrounded by strangers  
reading a book or taking a nap.  
A few flights depart, as others arrive,  
joyous reunions and sad farewells.  
A tired crew passes by,  
their marathon shift over for the day.  
More time passes without a change,  
even my patient nature stretching thin.  
But I keep in mind, if the tables  
were turned, he would be here for me,  
Looking out the large, tinted windows  
ominous storm clouds begin to form.  
With each passing hour  
a joyful resolution less likely.  
Suddenly, an announcement is made,  
Flight 1130 will begin boarding soon.  
A final whisper to my loved one,  
a gentle brush of his hair.  
With a calm smile, he lets go of my hand,  
taking the place reserved just for him.  
The plane ascends smoothly into the air,  
slowly breaking gravity's loving hug,  
above earthly ties, a big westward turn.  
Then the harsh reality I'm made aware,  
from this journey, he will not return.



## **The Call**

9:30 pm. My cell phone rings after a long day at the hospital. The kind nurse suggests that I return calmly, but with haste.

You think you are prepared and ready, but you are not certain how you will react.

Wonderful nurses and doctors have been great, doing everything possible to make him comfortable.

Around midnight, the head nurse comes in and takes his vital signs. I know what that look means.

She says, "It won't be long now. Call me if you need."

I remember being very calm and quiet as his breathing gradually became slower and slower.

As if somebody who had been huffing and puffing finally relaxes and their breathing begins to calm.

After an hour's time, his chest stops moving.

A soft brush of his hair and a last "I Love You".

Surprisingly, no tears. Instead, peace and release.

Knowing a better place, filled with friends, awaits him.

## **Chapter 7: Take Me Back**

After living in Chula Vista for 20 years, my father requested to be buried Sterling, in the same cemetery where his parents rest.

### **Across the Plains**

I step out of the car and feel the wind. I remember this wind. As if God had a giant bellow. A bellow large enough to blow hot air from Kansas, across Nebraska and into Colorado. Strong enough to make the endless stalks of corn sway in unison, making a rustling chorus like a windchime on a porch. More than just a breeze. Fresh air, air that feels good. Air that permeates the stillness, awakening life. Similarly, I remember the powerful radio waves of KOMA In Oklahoma, bringing music to AM radios across the great plains at night. Always a companion no matter how far you were from the nearest town. The sound of life under the big sky, illuminated by stars as you drive the long, straight roads home. Yes, this is where my father should be. Happy here.



### **God Controls the Weather**

Colorado is famous for having unpredictable weather. Days before and days after, cold and snow prevailed. Yet on the day reserved for my father, the sun rose warmly, the sky was clear and the day was beautiful. Looking at the names on the surrounding tombstones, I realized my father was surrounded by his community. Every obituary he had read in the paper for years was present and accounted for here.

Certain events change everything. Everything you thought you knew comes into question. All your priorities and goals are reevaluated. Not just a death, but an end of an era. Each future day will be different. Gil Bettger, you were a good one.

### **Homecoming**

Too long gone.  
Colorado calls me.  
Come home, son.

Breathe my air,  
feel my majesty,  
find your peace.

Plains, mountains, plateaus,  
wheat, rivers, snow,  
trout, elk, eagles.

Bring your father,  
back to family,  
his final rest.

Someday join him,  
on the Great Plains,  
where you belong too.



Gilbert Reed Bettger