

William J. Waters. Such a formal name for a man I simply called dad. Of course, others here had many other titles for him too, including: grandpa, great-grandpa, husband, uncle, cousin, coach, teacher, mentor, scoutmaster, friend, neighbor, and many more. But no matter how he was known to you, his presence in your life felt like a blessing.

The Waters house was a gathering place for family, friends, and random neighborhood kids that no one seemed to know. It was a comforting, welcoming place for so many people over the years, and that started with mom and dad's willingness to accept anyone into their home and treat them like family. As an only child, Dad loved hosting his extended family for visits, the Leisz's, the Westfalls, the Cravens, the Aernies, the Davis's and many more. He loved when the neighborhood kids would play in the yard, the Prendergasts, the Nortons, the Zagarias, Monroe's, Forche's, the Moore boys, and many more. Oh, he would put you to work when you got there, but he enjoyed having you, and he would probably invite you to dinner afterwards too.

Born in 1931, dad was very much a child of the great depression and the frugality of that era. As an adult, he would use something until he had wrung every last ounce of usefulness out of it and it was completely spent...and then continue to use it for another 20 years. His family were reluctant participants in these types of shenanigans. As children, we used to walk to school every day here at OLA. So, every winter, dad would drag out these heavy, ancient boots for us to wear. Now, these things could be called "boots" only in the most liberal sense of the word. They were black, they were vaguely foot shaped, and they had once been made of rubber. Unfortunately, they had long ago lost the ability to do, well, really the one job that really need boots to do, keep out water and snow. So dad came up with the brilliant, deranged plan for us to wear plastic bread bags on our feet as some sort of makeshift boot liner. In his defense and to be completely honest, they did solve the problem of wet feet, but as you can imagine, they didn't do much for our social life. Now I get it, social pressure back then wasn't what it is today with cell phones and Instagram and what not, but still, there were still lines you didn't want to cross, and I think that was one of them. I mean, I tried, but it's really really hard to look cool walking around with bread bags on your feet.

Dad wasn't a mechanic, but every Saturday he would be outside trying to keep our fleet of rusted cars running. Changing oil, replacing brakes, cleaning distributor caps, you name it, he did it, and expected all the boys to help him. This started when we were very little, and my unique fear when I was young was when he would invariably tell me to run down to the basement to get a very specific tool, such as a 9/16 inch socket wrench, which really wouldn't have been that bad, except for the simple and unfortunate fact that I had no idea what any of these tools were supposed to look like, not to mention the challenge that fractions presented to my 5 year old brain.

He wasn't an appliance technician, yet he fixed every single appliance in our house countless times over. He was so good at it that some of them just never needed replacing. Even now, if you wander over to 16207 West Park you'll find a kitchen stove older than me that looks like it just came out of a mid-century time capsule.

He wasn't a plumber, but that didn't stop him from pursuing the essentially futile goal of trying to keep unclogged the house's only shower drain that suffered under the strain of 14 humans using it a day. To do that, he didn't waste time with conventional drain cleaning chemicals or even a snake. No, he used a compressed air gun that looked like one of the proton accelerators from ghostbusters. He would have us fill that thing up with air to about 150 psi. seal the muzzle against the drain, say our prayers and pull the trigger. It's pretty amazing that this process admittedly cleared the drain fairly well. Unfortunately, all that drain clogging grossness that you just blasted out of there? Well it went directly out of the drain overflow and all over your face. You looked like a survivor being pulled from a coal mine collapse by the time you were done.

He wasn't a woodworker, but that didn't stop him from making just about everything he could think of out of wood, including treehouses for his kids, wooden handles for the dented old stainless-steel lunchbox he brought to work every day, new heads for his golf clubs, a roof rack to carry his prized aluminum row boat to the Lake Erie islands, and wooden bumpers to replace rusted out metal ones on his cars.

Another thing about dad was that he always stepped up when something was needed. Instead of coming up with reasons why he couldn't do something, he just did it, and did it well. When OLA needed someone to start a CYO soccer program and coach, dad volunteered. So, with absolutely no experience, he rolled out the rock hard plastic soccer balls he bought (and fortunately, he did not try to make those out of wood) and started coaching. Despite his lack of even rudimentary knowledge of soccer tactics, positioning, or technical ability, he guided his teams to multiple city championships over the years and, I think, world cup teams are still paying royalties for their use of the famed "WW" formation he invented.

Likewise, he was a longtime leader with the cub and boy scout troops at OLA, inspiring hundreds of boys in self-improvement and outdoor pursuits. This included his own sons, all of whom achieved the highest rank of eagle scout; well, all of them except for one who will remain unnamed.

In his retirement from NASA, or N-A-S-A as he would always confusingly call it, he didn't fade away. Instead, he became even more active. Seeing the need, and despite never having taught before, he started teaching science and other subjects at OLA, Metro Catholic, Padre Pio and other schools. His unique approach and hands on science demonstrations endeared him to his students. He continued to coach, was active in the OLA Holy Name society, and consulted for the government and numerous businesses. Oh, did I fail to mention his 59 grandchildren? Yeah, he spent just a little bit of time with them too. Sadly, and it pains me to say this, but some aspects of his life did not receive the attention they deserved. His golf game very much remained a work in progress and his taste in music and films tragically failed to progress past the 1940's.

In closing, it's kind of ironic that while being such a diehard supporter of St. Edward high school, what dad really best embodied was the Jesuit slogan of St. Ignatius, "men for others". He would have hated me saying that! But it's clear that we are describing a man who truly did live his life for others, touched so many people, and accomplished everything he wanted. So, while of course there is sadness here, because we will miss him immensely, this is not a tragedy. Instead, today is a celebration of a life well lived, spent in service to his family, his faith, and his community. So I would humbly ask that, today and throughout the holiday season, let's keep his memory alive with laughter, and stories, and the remembrance of how he inspired us all to be a better person.