

Companions on the Journey

June 20, 2021

Dear Friends,

Happy Father's Day to all our fathers—living and deceased. Blessings upon you all. Next month will be the fortieth anniversary of my own dad's death. Bernard Joseph McHenry. BJ. Mac. Dad. Uncle Bernie. Grandad. He had a lot of names. He was a good man. Not too long after his death I wrote an article which I submitted for publication about my dad. It wasn't accepted but the writing of it gave me some solace after his loss. I came across it recently and was reading some of it which I would like to share with you.

What kind of man was he? One who worked on the same New York Times Sunday Crossword Puzzle that his spouse was working on and felt comfortable enough erasing some of her entries. A man who started his own business with a wife and four small kids under the age of nine. A man who was proud of "never missing a payroll for his employees" in thirty plus years. A man who didn't start drinking until into his forties, grew to enjoy an extra dry martini but was willing to forego them as a sacrifice for her health to improve.

A man who loved to eat, to gather family and friends, to entertain, to offer hospitality. One who would sit in a rowboat with his little camera to snap pictures as his kids whizzed by on water skis. A man who would give his own baseball glove to a son who wanted a grown up baseball glove so bad. A man who had time to listen, to lend a helping hand, to offer good counsel. One who loved to sit on the swing on the front porch of his seashore house retelling humorous stories and sharing golden moments.

Shortly after his funeral I heard one of his clients (a man who had had a difficult childhood because of his own father) say: "He was the only man I ever loved." And another said simply that there was a feeling of unexpected joy at his funeral Mass that so moved him that he had decided to return to the faith and the sacraments.

He loved big red cars and body surfing and teaching his grand-children to sing. I remember him spending an afternoon outside the Eagles' locker room asking various players if they would write to his crippled grandson. He would do the tax returns of the widows in the parish and not charge them. He gave his employees off on Holy Days. Even the non-Catholics who did not quite understand but were grateful nonetheless.

And late in life he took to writing poetry. Almost always religious. The last poem was his longest and he finished it the day before he died. It was entitled The Role of Man. And it was his own understanding about why any of us are here. The final stanza is:

Man turns within, illumined from above
To see reflection not, but God Himself,
Glorifying, gracing his created soul.
In final light man understands his role
Which is to live, to love God, man and self,
Living in his God, and God in him, in love.

He was a really good man. And he was my dad.

**In the Peace of Christ,
Msgr. McHenry**