

Roy Claxton Eulogy

When my father was born in 1930, his father was already successful in the boom trade of that period - auto repairs. They had a chain of Claxton Garages from Seattle to Los Angeles and lived a grand life for a while, until the Great Depression made its way westward.

As a hobby, Roy's father began raising carrier pigeons. He built elaborate cages, and this lead to work on housing construction. That was how my Dad learned the building trade. But when he was just 14 years old, his father fell ill with bird flu and died unexpectedly. Thus Roy became the man of the house before his voice came into full resonance.

Gaining admission to UC Berkeley, my father was the first Claxton to attend university. He worked hard at it, but also played hard as a TKE (pronounced 'teak'). Tau Kappa Epsilon was one of the top fraternities and put Roy squarely into an A-list social network. It was through that network that he met his first wife, my mother Camille.

As years went by and David, Jeff and James were born, we all had a strong bond in the love of our parents. During summers Roy brought out a 'camp cupboard' - a wooden box built by his father to hold tin plates and cups. We loaded it and some sleeping gear into our station wagon and headed out to the countryside. Thus he taught me and my brothers the joys of camping.

When my father and his partner Hal Weiss started a construction company - modernistically named '20th Century Homes' - there were some difficult years. But they moved to Marin in the early 60s, and benefited from the megatrend of suburban expansion. Not only were they rewarded financially, they received many accolades for the modern design of their homes.

20th Century was well supported by suppliers and local bankers such as Redwood Bank, and later my father built on these relationships to expand into commercial development. He always said he did better in the business once he retired - a lesson in not getting too caught up in day-to-day operations.

In Peacock Gap, Mill Valley and later Ross, we always did things as a family. We had dinners together, saw concerts together and took holidays together. We spent weekends at a beach house in Stinson, and we began travelling each summer to a remote stretch of beach on the Eel River.

As Jeff and James became teenagers, more effort went into planning the annual camping trip on the Eel. It became a kind of reunion where everyone would hang out for 2 or 3 days under the sun and stars. Friends were invited to join us, and the menus became more elaborate. Roy was always at the center of planning and staging these great campouts. Tending the barbeque, he was the first to rise and the last to take a midnight dip in the river.

When Mariel and Roy married, here in this church, a new chapter began. While the boys were starting their own families, Roy and Mariel travelled the world and actively participated in cycling, tennis and golf. Nearly all Roy's grandchildren were born during this 20 year marriage, along with three great-grandchildren. It was a loving, happy marriage and an equal partnership too.

When Roy turned 75, David and his wife Kay organized a birthday party at the Eel River. It was a big celebration with Roy surrounded by his grown children, many grandchildren, and Mariel by his side. We swam, hiked and exchanged remembrances from 40 years of family camping trips.

As I look back now, I wonder why my father wasn't more prescriptive with me and my brothers. Instead, he gave us complete trust and let us learn our own lessons. Not all our choices were right, but we still had his unqualified love. He was a "watch and learn, live by my example" kind of guy.

This indirectness was mirrored in the challenge a son faces to communicate love and admiration to his father. Each of us found our own way past this inhibition, and I discovered that by including Roy in my circle of friends, we could be comrades. For example, I recently brought my dear friends Will and Anna Hoover to share a lunch with Roy. There was no picture taking, and no toasts were made, but it was an opportunity to see one another from a different perspective and a compliment my father understood.

My brothers and I admired our Dad because he was a self-made entrepreneur who was trusted and respected. He lived an abundant life, but he did so with humility, encouraging us to support charitable causes, as he did. Roy has made us proud of his legacy, and proud of the Claxton name.

- Bill Claxton, eldest son and resident of Singapore
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