

Lifetime Traits

I lost my father to cancer last week. An expected conclusion in his cancer battle but nonetheless a sad and sobering event. I had many months to consider and prepare for this unavoidable event and was well prepared for the sadness but had never considered the positive aspects which can be experienced from the death of a loved one.

News spread quickly on social media and within hours hundreds of uplifting comments had been received; sending condolences and sharing memories of the lasting impact he had made as a teacher, coach, park naturalist, author and many other roles he performed over 82 years. Over the next week there were front page stories in the Marshall Independent and Tracy Headlight Herald, a radio tribute and hundreds of additional posts on social media and at the visitation and funeral.

The posts were long and short, condolences and memories, and emanated from various times and places in his lifetime. The messages were seemingly unrelated but as processed the messages a couple of themes appeared. Common thoughts that were brought forward by people whose relationships with my dad varied greatly. I naturally started to compare my life as a Y Director to those traits which were held so tightly by my dad.

The first was the ability to find commonalities in people. It didn't matter where we were in the world; he was able to meet someone, find a commonality and build a relationship in minutes. These were often centered on sports, geography, people and history. I even witnessed this when he visited my wife and I as Peace Corps Volunteers in the Dominican Republic. He didn't speak the language but would find a way to build relationships through his actions.

He had friendships with people from all walks of life but a special place in his heart for those struggling in life. He used this to great effect in the classroom where a history lesson was important but respect was even greater. He was willing to alter his style to fit the needs of the individual, building relationships and getting the most from students. He taught by storytelling and made history come alive as more than places and dates.

I am not really sure what led me to a career in the Y but I see the Y mission in the traits of my dad. The Y is here to strengthen the community in more than just muscles. It is mentoring youth in common core values and a willingness to meet them where they are at in life. It is finding commonalities, bringing the community together for the good of all, and giving back so all can participate. It is the common hub where spirit, mind and body meet. It is a place where young and old, wealthy and poor, 3rd generation Marshallite and immigrant can come together as equals and care for one another. All ideals which make Marshall a better place to live, work and play.