

Eulogy for My Grandfather

By Andrew Megowan

On the night of April 21, 2011, my grandfather Joseph Splingaerd passed away in his home in Southern California. He was 91 years old, just a few weeks short of his 92nd birthday, and had been in failing health for quite some time. I decided speak at his funeral mass, and spent the past week agonizing over what to pick, out of 40 years of memories, as the right words to say. I knew that no matter what, many things would remain unsaid, and that was hard to live with.

I ultimately decided to let others speak of his remarkable history, positive traits, and achievements, and instead allow myself to focus on my relationship to “Grandpa Joe”, some stories and memories that would make people smile and laugh, and to take the scary step of allowing people to see the parts of him that remained alive in his grandson. It would be risky and audacious to make those comparisons, and a delicate matter to invite laughter at a funeral mass, and I approached the podium with a speech that was unrehearsed.



Today I read it aloud, unrehearsed, to the congregation of his loved ones. It was received better than I could have hoped, and I was told afterwards—by many of the people who had been closest to him—that I had succeeded in evoking his memory, and my resemblance to him.

I would like to now share with everyone that eulogy.

“I wanted to write something that I thought Grandpa would like. I hope you like it, too.”

“Thank you all for coming. Let me start by saying that, twenty years ago, I was overseas and missed my grandmother’s funeral, so I will have a few words about her, too, by way of goodbye.”

“Last night, I arrived here in Los Angeles by plane, and walked from the gate to the baggage claim area down a hallway that hasn’t changed in decades, and this triggered a memory. When my sister Cindy and I were children, the airport was a place that we went to, more than for any other reason, to pick up Granny and Grandpa for one of their visits.”

“Dad would park the car in the lot and we would all walk to the international arrival gate next to baggage claim. I would scan every face walking down that long hallway towards us, until we spotted one another, and there we would all smile and wave to one another. We would all chat happily as we piled into the car and headed home, where Cindy and I would eagerly bounce around the guest room while Granny and Grandpa unpacked, because we were eager to see what toys they had brought us this time.”

“Mom, Dad— since Granny and Grandpa can no longer get into trouble, I can finally confess: When you weren’t around, *they would spoil us*. No, no, it’s true. For example, when Granny and Grandpa had a house just a couple of miles from ours, and I would visit them, there was a bowl of candy on their coffee table. In that bowl was a particular candy that became one of my all-time favorites. So, when there is candy on a table somewhere, and you notice that the strawberry candies with the gooey centers are missing, I can now look you in the eye and say: (pause) Granny and Grandpa made me do it.”

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“But let me talk about my Grandpa now. Age 91. Almost 92. I think that’s a new high score. It means that Grandpa and I were born a half century apart. And we were born on opposite sides of the world, to completely different cultures. But we still had some special connections, a few things in common, a little symmetry in our lives here and there.”

“I can start with the obvious physical similarity.”

(I touched by bald head here)

“Yes, I inherited his hairline, which skipped a generation and landed squarely on my head, so thank you, Grandpa, for that. I also inherited his waistline, and expanded on it a little. But it looks like my Uncle Pete didn’t dodge that particular bullet.”

“I’ve been waiting 40 years for a chance to tease Uncle Pete.”

“Life in China was something else we had in common, if only for a little while, but that little bit counts, because we each fell in love with, a pretty girl at about the same age, in the same city of Tient’sin, China.”

“We both enjoyed creative expression through music. I am sure that for everyone here, some of your most powerful memories of Grandpa are going to be of his amazing singing voice. When I started reflecting what I would talk about today, the details of conversations, fishing trips, and family gatherings are blurry compared to the strong, sharp memories of his singing voice.”

“For my sister Cindy and me, some of our first memories of Grandpa are of sitting on the living room floor as children, listening to a cassette tape that he had made of himself singing us various children’s songs. Later, the sharpest memories would be of his voice filling a church without the aid of any microphone. To this day, when I think of—or hear—any of those children’s songs, like *The Itsy Bitsy Spider*, or religious songs, like *Ave Maria*—I hear his voice.”

“I have one more thing to share with you about his voice. Grandpa had a wonderful, distinct greeting on the phone, and I found it easy and fun to imitate. When I would phone home and my Mom would answer, I would frequently use that voice when saying “Hi!” I don’t think she was ever fooled, but it still got a laugh out of Mom so I kept at it for the past ten years. I won’t be doing that anymore, but I thought you all might appreciate my insight, because imitation, in addition to being the sincerest form of flattery, involves becoming, for just a moment, who you think that person was.”

“Here is how you do it:

You make your softer and gentler, but keep it clear.

Expand your chest to hold a bigger heart.

And into the word “Hi”, you inject all the joy of a doggy greeting his pet human.

Or, as I realized this morning, the joy of peering into a crowd at the airport and recognizing the face of someone you love.”

“Thank you, Grandpa. And goodbye.”