

## **Miles I. Graef**

December 22, 1919 – July 20, 1998

### **A Daughter's Tribute**

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.  
Where there is injury, pardon,  
Where there is doubt, faith,  
Where there is despair, hope,  
Where there is darkness, light,  
And where there is sadness, joy.  
O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;  
To be understood, as to understand;  
To be loved, as to love;  
For it is in giving that we receive –  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

It is appropriate that we hear the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm and the Prayer of St. Francis today – Not only are they Dad's two favorites, they exemplify his spirit and his life. And they are indicative of the ecumenical household in which my three brothers and I were raised. As we were tucked into bed, our mother prayed the Hail Mary with us and sang "Mother Dear, Oh Pray for Me!" – then it was Dad's turn – we recited the Lord's Prayer and he stood in the hallway between our bedrooms and sang The Old Rugged Cross so we could all hear it.

Many of you knew our Dad as the co-owner of the Burnham House Bed & Breakfast. I point out co-owner because he and my mother shared a partnership of the highest magnitude and the operation of the B&B was truly a joint affair. Mom would cook breakfast while Dad poured the coffee and juice; together they would visit with guests; and together they would clean up. For these past several years, they enjoyed doing yet one more thing together.

But, a few things happened along the way to Jackson, Minnesota. The youngest of five children, Dad was born on December 22, 1919 in Philadelphia. His ten year old sister (whom he grew to adore) was given the privilege of naming him. It is hard to imagine that a ten year old could think up Miles Ivan, but she did. Later, she would tell me that she had selected it because her mother did not like nicknames and because it indicated strength to her. She was correct on one count – my father was definitely strong – in every sense of the word. However, since he was rather small of stature (physically) as a young child, he had to put up with being called "inches" and "feet." During his life time, and he would tell you it was a great life – he would be called Daddy, Dad, Uncle Smiles, Pop-Pop, Grampa and "Butch."

Our father loved to dance and at one time thought of being a professional dancer. He and his brother Paul went to Atlantic City for a weekend in August and attended a dance on the Steel Pier. That same weekend, my mother and her sister also went to Atlantic City. And, when (according to our mother) Aunt Betty took off with her boyfriend (Betty's, not mom's), mom decided to wander out to the dance alone. "Say, have you got the time?" was a slogan for Lucky Strike and were the first words Dad spoke to mom. That was nearly 58 years ago and Mom always had time – for Dad – and us.

I am certain that Dad went to Atlantic City expecting to have a good time, but not expecting to meet his future wife. He expected to meet a woman and fall in love; he didn't expect to fall in love with an Irish Catholic. He expected to marry and have children; I don't think he expected to have four. He expected us to obey him. Dad expected an honest day's wages for an honest day's work. He expected others to treat him as he treated them. He expected to provide a home for his wife and family. I'm not sure that he expected to have homes in California, Germany and Minnesota. He expected he would die; he did not expect he would die of cancer. He expected that someone would fall in love with

him; I can guarantee you that he did not expect a woman as beautiful, elegant and gracious as our mother to do so. Our father awoke every day in awe of his good fortune.

Dad was a remarkable man, but I know that he would not have achieved his “greatness” without our mother. Listen to stories and you will realize that he was a “diamond in the rough” when Mom met him. They grew together. Our mother brought out the best in our Dad and we are all the better for it. Dad could get quite angry; mom could calm him. Dad could get quite crazy at parties – without drinking a drop of alcohol; mom would try to calm him. Dad could be vehement about something; mom could get him to listen to reason – eventually. Dad could pick out some outlandish outfits to wear; mom could get him to change his mind – sometimes (actually, not nearly as often as she’d like). And Dad was Mom’s strength – he was steady and true – comfortable with himself – and determined to be her protector. He was her confidant; her partner in life – and what a partnership they had. Together they packed up four children ranging in ages from 1 to 7 and moved 3,000 miles away from family and friends. They were 35. When they were 55, Dad was teaching at Los Angeles Trade Technical College and noticed an ad on the bulletin board for teaching opportunities in Europe with the Department of Defense. He asked mom what she thought and after listing the countries in which she didn’t want to live, Dad applied for a position in Germany. He was accepted and they departed for a one year tour. They stayed for five. In 1992, one week after celebrating their 50<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary, they moved again – this time to Jackson. Several months later, they started doing business as The Burnham House Bed & Breakfast. Needless to say, many people could not understand the decision to move from California to Minnesota and often asked, “Why?” My cousin, in attendance at the Anniversary celebration, will never forget my father’s answer to her. Said simply and lovingly -- “It will make Frances happy.”

Our father took his two major roles in life – husband and father – very seriously. He wanted to be a Father – and, as he will tell you, he did his best. And his best was pretty darn good.

There were four of us – Ken, Janie, Rob & Dave. Dad was wont to tell people he had four children; one of each kind.

Ken, born in 1945 while Dad was at sea in the Navy. Miles Kenneth – dad’s namesake – his #1 son (chronologically), the child most like our mother – brilliant – sensitive – an avid reader – and, following his parents example, he set the tone for our unique and oftentimes unpredictable sense of humor. Ken was as Dad (and as are Ken’s siblings) a procrastinator. We learned well from our father the philosophy of putting off til tomorrow what didn’t necessarily need to be done today. However, we also learned from our father that if anything was worth doing, it was worth doing well.

Ken was as “exact” as Dad – his seventh grade project of building a replica of the Eiffel Tower was a thing of beauty – they worked on it together. It was built to scale; it was level; it was transported very carefully to school in the family station wagon and it earned Ken an A. Like Dad, Ken had a strong sense of honor and he served his country well as an Officer in the U.S. Army. Also, like Dad, Ken was humble – we learned of Ken’s being awarded the Bronze Star by reading a copy of the Stars and Stripes sent to Dad by his brother, a retired Army Colonel. Ken’s death almost nine years ago – was a tragedy to all who loved him, but no more to anyone than it was to our parents. And, as their custom, they handled it together. This morning at the grave, you will see the flag which honors Ken as part of the Memorial Day Avenue of Flags. Today it is flown in honor of both our father and our brother. Ken was the father of our parents’ first grandchild – Kimberly – who four years ago presented mom and dad with their first great grandchild, Connor. I remember Dad saying, when Kim was born, that he didn’t mind being a grandfather – he just wasn’t crazy about sleeping with a grandmother. Pop-Pop was a big fan of Kim’s singing and their voices blended well this past week and when we buried Ken. I will always remember Dad giving Kim away, in loving memory of his son.

Rob – Dad’s second son – is truly his father’s son. He is kind, loving, gentle and accepting of what he cannot change. Growing up, we all said that mom loved him best – and there is good reason. Rob is just like the man mom married. He, too, is a procrastinator. He, too, is a teacher. He, too, has the same dry and sometimes caustic wit. He, too, is soft spoken, but can yell when the situation warrants it. He, too, adores his wife and puts his family first. Dad set an excellent example and Rob learned well. In these past few months of Dad’s illness, Rob was the one who took over duties Dad was too weak to handle. For the past two weeks, I watched my brother care for our father in a way that made us all proud and provided Dad with the level of comfort and dignity he so rightfully deserved. And, it was

apparent that Rob's and Marilyn's children, Carrie, Ellen, Jenny and Katie loved their Grandma and Pop-Pop, constantly providing comfort and humor for both of them. Dad's ability to care for others and sense of humor has definitely trickled down to the next generation.

Our father worked hard to be a good provider – he was an electrician and also taught Apprentice Electricians two nights a week. We knew not to plan anything on Tuesday or Thursday that would require our father's presence, because he would not miss class. Somehow, the PTA didn't pay attention, and scheduled their meetings and events on Thursday. When Rob was in the Sixth Grade, he competed in a Spelling Bee – on Thursday night. Dad's work was important, but not nearly as important as his family and he sat in the audience proudly and patiently (unlike the rest of us) as Rob spelled each word very slowly and correctly (just like his father). Rob won, eventually, and Dad hurried off to school.

Dave – the baby – again a procrastinator and his Dad's sense of humor. Actually, Dave could really make Dad laugh – it got him out of trouble – often, and it served to cheer Dad during these difficult months. Ken, Rob and I broke Mom and Dad in -- Dave definitely benefitted from being the youngest. In actuality, he got away with murder. While attending a Fiesta to benefit Dave's and Rob's high school, Dave discovered that someone was raffling off a German Shepherd puppy. Mom, being the soft touch that she was (and is), bought several chances. Dad purchased one chance and, lo and behold, he won -- Dave very quickly took possession of "Colonel," and worked hard to develop this dog's unique talents. Although Colonel was officially Dave's, he respected Dad and, like us all, responded quickly to Dad's booming voice. When Dave left for college, Dad took over the care and feeding of Colonel and did so lovingly.

Like Dad, Dave is gregarious and outgoing; comfortable in any crowd. Also like his father, Dave is a benevolent dictator – he sets the rules and expects his children to follow them. He bought the home in which we were raised from Mom and Dad so he is actually setting the rules in the same setting as Dad did. A major difference between then and now is that Dave's and Jan's children get to swim in the GD pool -- an addition made after we had all left home. Dave and Dad shared a practical, "common sense" approach to life, the belief that things are black and white and a love for country music. They were quite a duet singing "Lay Your Head Upon My Shoulder." "Silver Tongued Devil" was another favorite. Like Dad and Rob, Dave is a great husband – and he and Jan, together, have raised three children, Heather, Shannon and Jeremy who provided great joy to Dad when they would call and have a "Sing-a-long."

And, there was definitely me. The second child, the only daughter – again a procrastinator and I think Dad hoped I would grow up to be exactly like my mother. I fooled him, I'm just like he was. I talk to cars when their drivers do stupid (in my opinion) things and God help someone who tries to cut me off. I greet people on the street with a smile. I talk to strangers. I love to dance. I like parades and children's programs. I'm stubborn. I forgive slowly and I never forget. I may criticize my family, but I will kill anyone else who might. However, I can't, and therefore don't, sing. And Dad loved me in spite of myself. He gave me my first corsage when I was in a school play in the first grade; he sent me valentines; he teased me; he taught me to ride a bike and to parallel park; and he was always there when I needed him, and I needed him often. When I taught First Grade, I was placed in charge of the school's annual Christmas Program and decided that 50 little boys should each have a drum to sing "The Little Drummer Boy." My father painted and painstakingly drilled holes into 50 coffee cans so my wish could be achieved. And, he sat in the audience as pleased with my accomplishment as parents of the performers were.

As their single child, I did not provide Mom and Dad with grandchildren, but I did manage to increase the family circle. Several of my friends looked to Dad as the father they never had and my best friend who is a CPA became his "favorite daughter" during the month of April and her husband Ward truly appreciated Dad's warmth and frugality. Their daughter, Laura, became a Granddaughter in Heart and Dad was an avid fan of their son Chuck's piano playing..

When I was a little girl, I thought my Dad was the tallest, most handsome man in the world and he could fix anything. As an adult, I grew to realize that my Dad's stature was not from his physical height; his beauty was truly from within and he could, indeed, fix anything. He always was the Man of my Life.

Dad was innovative – he made cinnamon coffee before it was "in;" he wore stripes and plaids before it was fashionable (and after); he wore dark socks with swimming trunks; he had "family values" before they became a political mantra; he made rectangular hamburgers to fit hot dog buns, and he thought hugging his sons was a true sign of masculinity.

If you knew our father, you have probably had the opportunity to hear at least one of his clichés – and he had a number of them – each designed to fit a specific situation. In fact, during the last week of his life, we played the “Finish the Cliche” game and he got them all correct. And, perhaps not a cliché, but Dad often said ... “didn’t effect me; didn’t effect me” (while moving his head jerkily). Among his favorites – “We grow too soon old and too late smart.” “There are no strangers, only friends I haven’t met yet.” “Better to burp and bear the shame, then not to burp and bear the pain.” “Scratch where it itches; not where it looks the best.” “To thine own self be true.” “Good enough for the girls we go with.” “Give me a puff on that before you throw it away.” “The hurrier I go, the behinder I get.” “The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence, but when you get there it always has to be mowed.” “Just when I thought I could make ends meet, they moved the ends,” “That and a dime will get you a cup of coffee;” “Good enough for government work.” And the one we heard most often recently – throughout all his medications – “Laughter is the best medicine.” When he was sitting at a favorite restaurant, or on vacation, he often said, “I wonder what the poor people are doing now.”

Our Dad liked hot dog sandwiches, thinly sliced meats (you should have seen him slice a ham and carve a turkey); real candles on the Christmas tree, his train set, kool aid with half the sugar; his polyester reindeer jacket, a bargain--two-penny cheese and any canned goods 12/\$1, clean sheets and open windows, driving, his mother’s toast (ask his granddaughters for the recipe), singing, dancing, cream cheese and olives on rye toast, his own spaghetti sauce, precisely equally shaped meatballs (he measured before he rolled and cut), and he loved us.

When we hear someone sneeze, and it could be measured on the Richter Scale, we will remember Dad.

When we work with an erector set, we will remember Dad.

When we enjoy Holiday dip, we will remember Dad.

When we build something with bricks (i.e., a retaining wall), we will remember Dad.

When we pull weeds, we will remember Dad.

When we play Skipbo, we will remember Dad.

When we play Fish, we will remember Dad.

When we see a young man pushing his children on swings, we will remember Dad.

When we see an older man playing with his children’s children, we will remember Dad.

When we listen to Chopin, we will remember Dad.

When we see a man opening the car door for his wife, we will remember Dad.

When we see a man standing up in a restaurant when a woman leaves the table, we will remember Dad.

When we see a grandfather bursting with pride at the success of his grandchild, we will remember Dad.

When someone says they’re drinking Encore and mean Ensure, we will remember Dad.

When we hear someone laughing heartily, and with gusto, we will remember Dad.

When we see a couple dancing effortlessly around the room, we will remember Dad and his love for Mom.

That man is a success who has lived well, laughed often and loved much; who has gained the respect of intelligent men and the love of children; who has filled his niche and accomplished his task; who leaves the world better than he found it, whether by an improved poppy, a perfect poem or a rescued soul; who never lacked appreciation of earth’s beauty or failed to express it; who looked for the best in others and gave the best he had.

Dad, you done good.