

“Age puts its hand on us lightly if we have used the years well.”

Thanks to his advanced age when he died and my tender age when I first met Alan, I knew my father-in-law for 41 years—longer than I knew either of my own parents.

In 41 years I don't think that I ever heard anyone say an unkind word about Dad. He was a person who made people happy just by being himself. Everyone in the family adored him, wanted to *be* him...and all of our friends wanted a Sol in their lives as well.

How can you not love the Energizer Bunny? Well into his 90's Dad's activities put the rest of us to shame. After Mom died, he took up the habit of calling Alan and Evey late each evening to check in and to report on the day's activities. Typically he had been to at least 3 on any given day, ranging from folk dancing or teaching, violin practice, jam sessions with Judy, or swimming, to a free concert or two in a park or a synagogue or a college, or to a play, or stage performance by a corny comedian.

And of course he drove to all those activities. He drove a car in both NY and Florida until he got sick this August. In between times, he rode his bike, worked in his garden growing the ubiquitous raspberries and baseball bat-sized zucchini that he shared with me so I could make them into soups or breads.

If his physical activities were not enough, Dad became a computer aficionado to the delight of his son. Every night's telephone conversation, and some daytime ones in between, had the computer question of the day. Dad owned and used 2 computers *and* a PalmPilot, a personal assistant device that I couldn't wait to give back when I retired from the ADL. But Dad mastered them all. And I think he was thrilled to be able to keep learning more about how to use them by picking Alan's brain on a very regular basis.

Dad may have lost his strength in these last 4 months but he never lost his faculties. His mind remained sharp and his wit ever present up until the end. At 95 his memory was incredible and easily put mine to shame.

At the end of October, some friends and I went to at the JCC in New Haven to hear Dr. Sherwin Nuland speak on the topic “Aging is Not a Disease.” I was the youngest of those friends and I am 58, so this was a lecture for *our* future, not for our parents’. We had met Shep Nuland a couple of years ago when I invited him to speak for our Hadassah chapter in Waterbury about his memoir, “Lost in America: A Journey with My Father.” He is also known for his National Book Award for “How We Die: Reflections on Life’s Final Chapter,” which I had also read.

This time, Nuland’s theme was the following bit of advice, garnered from his most recent extensive research with oldsters:

“Age puts its hand on us lightly if we have used the years well.”

It seemed to me to be a definition of my father-in-law.

Nuland found, through his research, that the 3 most important things about aging were:

- relationships -- this one is the “holy grail” as he put it
- maintenance of body
- creativity -- making *something* be it music or a good golf game

I realized as I reflected, and then wrote on Dr. Nuland’s lecture, that without having done any research of his own, my father-in-law had instinctively mastered all three of those crucial elements to aging well.

Dad’s relationships were strong...so strong that he was confident enough to develop a new relationship after Mom died and to share many, many happy hours, days and years with Judy Hirsch who brought him much joy.

Dad took care of his body. For years he and Mom lined up a collection of vitamins with their morning coffee. And they both kept physically active with folk dance to keep physically well...until the end.

Dad was creative. As Alan explained in his eulogy, he grew up thinking his dad could make anything...and he did...he was always tinkering or playing the violin, or learning and teaching new folk dances.

Certainly age put its hand lightly on Dad because Dad used his years well.

It's a lesson he taught us all, without telling us what to do, without preaching, without saying "follow me." He just lived his joyous life...and we all watched in awe and naturally tried to figure out what kept him so alive until the age of 95.

Rest in peace, Dad.