

# A Farewell to my Father

By Roger Dean Osborne

Four years. That's how long Dad fought lung cancer. Initially, doctors told him he had 18 months to live; however, he proved them wrong and exceeded all expectancies. But, as we all know, this dreaded disease, no matter how quickly or slowly, takes its toll on our flesh. He departed this world on Wednesday, May 30, 2007 at 5:17 a.m., surrounded by his five children.

From the moment the doctors delivered the sad news of his diagnosis, Dad made it clear he wanted quality of life – *not quantity*. He refused to treat the disease through “conventional” medical procedures – radiation and chemotherapy were not an option in his mind. And to his credit, choosing this route probably enabled him to live longer, due to the type of cancer he had, which grew very slowly and didn't spread until close to the end.

In my conversations with him, Dad told me one of his greatest fears was the possibility of cancer spreading to his brain. He worried he might lose his ability for rational thought, and not be cognizant of the world around him. “If you lose *that*,” he said in a matter-of-fact tone, “you might as well not be living.” I'm glad to say, through the end, he knew us all, even making an occasional witty remark to keep us on our toes.

Since the time I was old enough to remember, Dad has battled one ailment after another – from bladder cancer, numerous back surgeries, heart valve replacement, and finally lung cancer. And through it all, he maintained a positive attitude and rarely complained of the pain we all knew he must be feeling.

Writing was his passion. When I was a child, without fail, he awoke early each morning and quietly made his way to the small oak-stained desk in the dining room. And no matter how many years have come and gone since that time, I can *still* hear the distinct sounds of his typewriter beating wildly against the paper in the early morning hours before school. His ability to transport the reader into the world written before them was a God-given talent few possess. With great precision and simplicity he weaved stories that made time stand still – if but for a moment.

Throughout his battle with cancer, Dad's zeal for writing never faded. On good days, when the pain would momentarily subside, he would write. A partially finished manuscript is a final testimony to his love for this craft.

Before he retired, Dad worked 19 years at the *Dayton Daily News*. When he first began, he worked as a Linotype operator; however, after discovering his knack for writing, he was eventually promoted to the publishing department, where he worked until retirement. He often laughed when giving account of people with Bachelors and Doctorate degrees coming to him for help, to proof their stories before sending them to the Editor. And with a wide smile he'd recount returning the paper to them, complete

with a host of grammatical corrections and rewrites. “Not bad for someone who never went to college,” he would proudly say.

His first published book, *The Land of Yesterday*, struck a heart chord with many people. For the first time, stories of that era were told that presented the truest form of what it meant to be Appalachian, and stood squarely in the face of a stigma that plagued a misunderstood culture. “The truth needs to be told,” he would say, “and that’s exactly what I’m doing.”

His novel, *The Mountains Wept*, wove an unforgettable tale of love and romance into this same beloved heritage of years gone by. I remember reading one of the (many) drafts of this story when I was a teenager, and clearly recall being so proud of him and surprised at how much I enjoyed it with each passing page. He once told me he chose the book title because that was how the mountains looked as he was leaving his home place. The coal mines were closing and the migration of thousands of Appalachians had begun. Dad said the clouds appeared to be resting on the mountain tops with a light rain falling – “It looked like the mountains were crying; as though they *knew* things would never be the same again,” he once said.

He was never the typical “dad.” He didn’t like sports or fishing, nor was he the sort of guy who could go out and build something with his bare hands; however, he loved music. At times, when I was a child, he would sit me and my sisters down in the living room and begin playing short snippets of songs from his large record collection, giving each of us a chance to guess the name. I was younger than the rest, so I rarely had an inkling of the song title; regardless, there was a lot of laughter and excitement in this game and is something I’ll cherish.

Another fond memory is of Dad and Mom singing in the car on vacations. I can still hear his tenor harmony as they sang, “Day by day, I’m loosing my blues; more and more, I’m forgetting ‘bout you.” And I always laughed hearing him imitate Dean Martin with “That’s Amore.”

He wasn’t the type who could sit down and tell you face-to-face how he felt; yet he had no problem expressing his innermost thoughts and raw emotions through written form.

There are *many* things I will miss about my father – the chief among these being the relationship he and I developed over the last few years of his life. Rather than being a parent who wanted to tell me how to do things, instead, he made himself available when I needed someone to talk to; and he only offered guidance when asked, and encouragement always. His belief in me, and what I could do, made a great impact in my life.

I’ve heard it said that time will heal all things, but I don’t believe we fully experience that “healing” in this life. The sting of death at the loss of a parent, spouse, child or close friend never completely goes away. We are left with only memories of a

precious time in our lives when they were present – the way they looked, their laugh, their smile, the touch of their hand.

Dad, I can assure you, without hesitation, “the mountains wept” at your passing. The work you’ve done to restore pride and admiration to the culture of your youth will *never* be forgotten. Your bittersweet labor of love is complete. And though the sorrow of your departure is so hard for us to bear, you’re better off than those you left behind. So I say farewell – but not goodbye – to you; for it is with a promise and belief in God’s only Son that I will meet you again in Heaven some day.

Until that day comes, I’ll trust you will spend a little time around a different creek than of your youth. Put your feet in and feel the cool, clear water rush between your toes. Pain and suffering are but a distant memory. Tell your Mom, Dad, Uncle Stamp and the rest that I’ll be seeing you all again soon.

I love you, Dad.