

Eulogy for Anthony Cassano

Intro

How can I try to capture the near 93 years my beautiful father spent on this spinning rock of ours? I could list all his achievements and try to give the story of his life, but that would not do him justice, for the central theme of his life was not about achievement; rather, it was all about the connection with his family and friends; in fact, looking out on all of you, I know he's upset that he's not here, physically, to be with us. Which is unfortunate for we are unable to receive the hugs and kisses that he loved to give and that we loved to receive.

So, instead of a list of achievements and facts, what I thought would be a good way to think about his life is to look at three qualities he possessed throughout his long and full journey. These are traits that I've tried my best to emulate, and I am still striving to come close to his unattainable standards.

So what are these three qualities? I'm certain, with a little thought, anyone who knew him would come up with the same, for they were so readily apparent.

The first one is Intelligence.

One of my bigger challenges the past couple of years was trying to get dad to adopt technology.... Facetime calls with his hearing aids synced was a big recent accomplishment. But I remind myself that my dad was ridiculously brilliant in so many ways.

He had the proverbial “book smarts”. He was the first member of his family to get a college degree, followed up with a masters degree, and then a long and successful career. And his book smarts certainly served him well in doing his Sudoku and Jumble puzzles to the very end. He really did enjoy thinking – his mind was always active and curious.

But what I term “book smarts” is just one aspect of his intelligence, there are many other dimensions. Dad, forever the engineer, knew how to fix almost anything , without a single google or YouTube search. He just knew how things worked. I lost count of the number of times he fixed that decades old gas dryer in the basement (which was finally replaced this year).

Something many of you might not know, he had amazingly good handwriting and drawing skills - his doodles were works of art. I always envied that dexterity and talent he had. Speaking of dexterity, as a quick aside, if you ever watched my father eat anything with bones (such as chicken feet which his mother would always make him, a tradition my sister Donna continued), you would not believe how pristine those bones would be once he was done with it.

I could go on with his wide array of talents and intelligence, but the next two are even more central to who my father was.

Number 2 is his Sense of Humor

We all know dad could tell a joke... the wide mouth African frog, the son of a something fish, Goldilocks and the three bears with an incredible Italian accent I am far too ill-equipped to try to mimic. He would make others laugh easily in any conversation. He also had a natural and infectious laugh. Thinking of big smile, I think his sense of humor is far more subtle and expansive than just laughter and jokes.

Behind his sense of humor was an optimism and faith that served him and others so well. Dad's optimism and faith was how he slept like a rock his entire life. I'm sure almost all of us would envy him on that. During my recent stays with dad, I'd wake up, make myself breakfast, read my emails and newsfeeds, do my puzzles... and he would eventually saunter in around 10:30am like a teenager. He loved his sleep.

As his knees eventually ruined his mobility, he told me once, "I've always assumed things just get better". It almost surprised him that his knee issues and lack of mobility was something that wasn't going away. But that optimism is something that served him so well throughout his life. He was happy by nature.

(Capacity for Love)

Being smart and funny is all well and good, but I'm saving the big one for the end. And that is his remarkable, off the charts, capacity to love. For me, being the youngest and only son of the family, I was spoiled rotten with his love. He was a "modern" father, in that he wanted to know everything going on in my life. 5 o'clock family dinners were for talking just as much as eating (which is saying something, given his love of a good meal).

Once I left the house, I continued regular long chats with mom and dad (Sunday 4pm-5pm) and, after mom passed, we'd chat for about an hour on most days (when he was available and heard the phone). For my dad, love was a verb. He practiced it continually throughout my life.

My sisters were just as lucky. He always told them they can achieve whatever they want in life and was so proud of them as they pursued their careers and raised their families. To say he was engaged with his children is an enormous understatement. And, as you can guess, that carried forward to his grandchildren and even his two great-grandchildren. They all won the grandpa lottery. He also was remarkably close to all his in-laws. It's not a surprise that Uncle Cass was adored.

This enormous ability to love was, most obviously, apparent in his extraordinary marriage to my mother, of almost 6 decades. My dad didn't have lots of hobbies after retirement. His

main hobby was loving and spending time with mom. It really didn't matter what he did, if it was with her, he was as happy as he could be. When she passed away, I saw a grief that I didn't know could exist. He truly wanted to leave this world, which would have been 13 years too early.

A couple of years or so after mom passed, dad mentioned to me that, in a grief support group, he met someone who reminded him of my mother. Forever the charmer, Natalie became dad's companion. Dad asked me, not that long ago, "Mark, do you think someone could love two people"... needless to say I said of course. My dad was fiercely loyal, but he knew my mother would want him to find another love. And, to Natalie, I'll be forever grateful for the joy you gave my father.

His gift of love was in no way limited to family, it extended to his friends, especially the families in our neighborhood who became our extended family, such as the Pantes and Scagliones. As he got older, his connections with family and friends were his nourishment. I remember being so worried during COVID when he would go to his weekly lunches, but I knew his need for being with his friends and family outweighed the risk. I'm not exaggerating, the day he got the vaccine was one of the happiest days in recent memory.

I apologize for my rambling and I only just touched the surface. At the end of the day, I like to think of the concept that in life, you should make the world a better place **with** you, than it would be without you. And, as everyone here knows, dad did that in spades (which is such an appropriate phrase, as dad was an excellent bridge player). More importantly, dad continues to make this world a better place, as he has touched and influenced all of us. We are blessed.