

## Eulogy for Peter Kanwit

I'm Matt Kanwit, Peter's son. I'd like to share some lessons from our Dad, inspired by wonderful advice he gave me six months ago when I was unexpectedly preparing a friend's eulogy. He said to speak from the heart, be specific, and have a theme. So I'll tell you some specifics about our Dad, informing who he was: someone who valued home and all that it entailed, growth through healthy competition, and finding and responding to a calling. In doing this, he balanced professional skills in the Human Resources world with a deep care and concern for the dignity of those on his path—individuals from a wide range of backgrounds.

Let's start with home. Our Dad found an equal in our Mom. They grew up in different regions, he in northern Virginia, she in New Iberia, LA, and with different traditions. They often had different perspectives on the issues of the day, but theirs was a true partnership across the aisle. And across the table, when they would play marathon games of Scrabble. He would often quip, if our Mom took too long, that in between turns he could complete his taxes. In the early years, it seemed like he often won. But the more they played, I dare say she became the more regular champion. They're both very competitive but I also think he, ever the coach and mentor, felt great joy in just how good she got.

Our Dad thought animals complemented any home. The bird feeders (plural) were always filled in the backyard, with renegade squirrels chastised if they got too close. Later, he read about the breed of Jack Russell Terriers. I recall him saying, "They're smart, small, and scrappy. I think they'll fit in well around here." And they did. First, Max, then Maya. Later in life, he came to love his Havanese granddogs, Catherine and Noel's Charlie and Poppy, perfect for sitting in his lap on the sofa or later in the wheelchair.

He felt any home should be filled with music. He'd add to his collection, and I'll never forget a fateful trip with him to Blockbuster Music. Remember those? In those days, you could put on giant headphones and listen to a CD before purchase. As I did my in-store perusing, I was stopped in my tracks by a loud, screeching version of Toni Braxton's "Unbreak My Heart" from across the store. Looking up, I realized the vocalist was indeed... my Father, wrapped up in the music and unaware of how the headphones had muffled perception of his own loudness. I'm not sure that I ever returned to that location. But like many adventures with our Dad, it made for great stories and laughs.

At home, he loved gardening, growing roses; and the backyard was a wonderland; depending on the season you might find a delicious navel orange or an easy-to-peel satsuma. One year the peach tree harvest was particularly robust, and he and my Uncle Ben made peach preserves. He made me take two to my homecoming date's house for her and her parents, despite my protesting that it would not be the coolest move. I guess that's why it didn't work out with her. But he was always happy for us to share what we had. Like when he made a giant winter batch of chili the January day after Cat and Noel's wedding, inviting all of the out-of-town family over for a warm, homemade feast: his brother Roy and sister-in-law Mary, their daughter Ariana and grandbaby Phoenix, his sister Lisa and brother-in-law David and their kids Karen and Michael, their partners Justin and Jade, and grandkids Charlie and Maggie, the latter mesmerized by a Jack Russell Terrier (Maya) happy to have extra attention.

Our Dad preached smart financial decisions, and was thrilled when Cat met Noel, who already owned—you guessed it— a home. He insisted I stop renting and sent me so many emails that I caved and let one of his visits center around house hunting in Pittsburgh, and he wisely led me to a great place. Recently, Noel and Cat paid off their mortgage, making our Dad utterly happy. And in 23 years, when mine is paid off, I'll raise a glass to him.

In my house, one memory I'll never forget is of him and my Mom, in a late-July visit for their anniversary and my birthday. I had friends over for a party. My parents socializing smoothly with everyone, my Mom ascending up to bed at a reasonable hour for a senior citizen. My Dad staying downstairs to celebrate with the 30-somethings for hours more. I can still picture him laughing there with some of my dear friends, wondering how he wasn't more tired. My sister and I kept him young, he'd say. As did our partners and friends, whom he'd always ask about: "how's Brandon?" "What are Brad and Katie up to?" "What did Cat Gretchen solve today?" And on and on.

Our Dad thought part of the way we could improve ourselves was through healthy competition and training. Beyond Scrabble with my Mom, he loved sports, especially basketball from his time as a UNC undergrad. He would coach my teams at Metairie (now Pontiff) Playground, always sure to tell everyone not to call him Coach K, the dreaded moniker of rival Duke's Mike Krzyzewski. So, Coach P it was. Of course, he cared that we practiced more than sports, and he loved to talk about his family members' accomplishments. "Your Mom sure knows how to grow a beautiful rose," he'd say. Or he'd embarrass my sister and me with updates to anyone in earshot. "Dad, that stranger doesn't care what we got on a test... or that Catherine was Outstanding Alto at Mount Carmel."

In enjoying competition, he loved the New Orleans Saints. Whenever I was home, we'd watch together; but mostly this involved phone calls during commercial breaks, usually ending abruptly with "Ok, we'll see what they do" [click]. In 2009, when "Pigs have flown, hell has frozen over," was Jim Henderson's call, the Saints finally headed to their first Super Bowl, against the Indianapolis Colts. I was a graduate student at Indiana Univ. at the time, the lone Saints fan in a sea of Colts' blue. And yet I wasn't so alone—at least not during the commercial breaks with him. Of course, Saints fans also know about heartbreak, and my Dad could always provide the perspective we needed after the so-called Minneapolis Miracle (not so miraculous for us) and the dreaded Rams no-call of pass interference. Ugh, in every sense... too soon.

Another of our Dad's key values was to find one's calling. He solidified his in New Orleans, having moved here for his MBA at Tulane, then meeting my mother. And here we are 49 years since their wedding.

In a city as unique and culturally vibrant as New Orleans, it's hard to leave, and if you do, it's hard to stay gone, as many of you know. But our Dad encouraged us to spread our wings, like when one summer brought Catherine an opportunity on a dude ranch in Jackson Hole, WY. When college and the time since have kept me out of state, there was no bigger voice telling me to go for it. It makes sense; his own life was enriched living in various regions: raised in VA, college in NC, work in New Orleans, time spent serving our country in Nuremberg, Germany. Only later did I even realize I seemed to be following a path he'd laid out for me, when I moved to VA (in my case, for college) & then to NC, the same order as him.

He retained a fondness for Europe and encouraged me to take a life-changing experience spending junior year of college in Spain. He and my Mom visited for Thanksgiving; we rented a car and toured southern Spain. In our somewhat National Lampoon's Griswoldian adventures, we didn't figure out until late in the trip that there was a ring to push down to get the car in reverse, so instead he'd put it in neutral and have his son push the car backward. But he always got us where we needed to be, as we'd come to expect.

That ability of his to connect with young people was also part of his calling, seen in his excellence as a mentor. He received the Pritzker Award at Hyatt Hotels, honoring outstanding leaders, coaches, & mentors. And he mentored MBA students at Tulane's A.B. Freeman School of Business. Some of those students and employees remained in touch with him for decades and have reached out to us this week. He loved to help those beginning new journeys, and encouraged me to take a job where I could mentor PhD students of my own at the Univ. of Pittsburgh. His was great, rewarding advice. And his impressive

ability to maintain relationships for decades, something our Mom also excels at, was emphasized in our home. I guess it's not surprising, then, that many loving faces here today, in-person and online, have been in our lives for so very long.

Parkinson's stripped some independence, but he and our Mom never lost their senses of humor or optimism. When he started to require a motorized grocery cart to shop, our Mom noted that he wasn't quite in control of the vessel, informing us, "a woman had to dive out of the way in produce, you know?" With my dad retorting "Well, she shouldn't have been in the way." Agree to disagree.

With Parkinson's, he would find new ways to seek purpose. After five falls, we had to make the incredibly difficult decision that the safest care would be beyond the family home. Fortunately for us, my sister Catherine, like his mother Julia and his sister Lisa, is a social worker. She and occupational therapist Noel helped ensure he ended up in a modern facility with great care where he could flourish. Rather than feeling too defeated by his circumstances, he saw opportunities to use skills he'd honed in human resources at the Veterans Home by becoming President of the Southeast Louisiana Veterans' Council. He took the role very seriously and worked hard to initiate programs that improved the lives of fellow residents and staff, like honoring many wonderful staff members through a monthly recognition program and increasing catered dining options for the vets. He even brought a piece of the Saints there, getting his former Royal Orleans coworker Mark Romig, in-stadium voice of the Saints, to visit, share programs, and talk all things Who Dat Nation.

In conclusion, our Dad managed to balance the tough and the tender well. He was no pushover –perhaps some of that Army training. But he embodied unconditional love, and there's never been a day that we doubted whether he accepted us in all our totality, that we could be ourselves, and that those selves were good. He found ways to make home special, to help others improve, and to value one's calling; doing this with extraordinary concern and open-minded respect for the diverse group on his path.

The time ahead for us is not easy, but one of the major lessons he taught us in the past six years, and throughout his life, has been one of resiliency. Not to give up, when feeling physically or mentally limited, when a job isn't the end-all be-all, or when a hurricane damages your home. In a time when we need resilience, he, along with our Mom, has always shown us how to acknowledge what we're feeling, show steadfastness, hold onto our strong foundation, and somehow, little by little, to soldier on. We love you, Dad.