

March 21, 2024

Thoughts About My Dad

By Shelli Johnson

When I was three years old, my parents moved us from Iowa to Wyoming. Nothing against Iowa, but I consider this one of the greatest gifts my parents have given me.



I have fallen in love with Wyoming and its open spaces, and I cannot imagine what my life would be like without Wyoming in it.

And I have my Dad, mostly, to thank for this.

While growing up, during the summer, my Dad took us on picnics almost every week. On Sundays after church, he often took us on scenic drives—he called them “country drives.” He’d load a cooler full of ice, soda pops, and cold cuts, and he’d take our family on tours of the Loop Road, to South Pass and Atlantic City, and on seemingly-endless drives through the Red

Desert. Weekend trips to Yellowstone and the Tetons were also common.

While I loved these experiences and they are among my most cherished childhood memories, I wasn’t much of an outdoors person. During those years, I was mostly a jock. I played volleyball and basketball, and ran track. Basketball was my favorite. When I first discovered the game, in 6th grade, my Dad had a cement pad poured and installed a basketball hoop for me. We spent hours shooting baskets and I’ll never forget those memories of me shooting baskets and my Dad rebounding for me, for hours at a time.

That dedication paid off in 1986 when I received a full ride Division 1 basketball scholarship to the University of Montana. Unfortunately, I blew my knee out during Fall training of my first season. I was red-shirted and although I recovered from the knee surgery, my comeback didn’t happen fast enough and resulted in the loss of my scholarship at the start of my junior year. While devastating at the time, the end of my basketball career ended up being one of my most spectacular failures and one of my greatest blessings, because it was only after not having basketball in my life that I discovered hiking. And, for the last 30 years, hiking has been my biggest passion.

Growing up I loved writing stories. In fact, one of my closest friends from grade school, whom I reconnected with 13 years ago after being out of touch with for 30 years, reminded me that I used to write her notes in class that were in the form of stories and that I dreamed of one day being a writer. I’m a voracious reader and I love writing, and sharing stories.

My Dad is one of the greatest storytellers I know and I like to think I get my storytelling abilities from him.

When I arrived at UM, I started out majoring in psychology, but it wasn’t long and I switched to Journalism. After my sophomore year of college, I returned home to Lander for the Summer. At the time, my parents owned the community newspaper in Lander, the *Wyoming State Journal*, and my Dad offered me a journalism internship at the paper.

It turned out to be a more exciting opportunity than I could have ever imagined because that was the summer of Yellowstone's 1988 fires. I covered the fires, along with other local news. It was a challenging experience that helped me to cut my teeth as a writer and reporter, and in community journalism. I appreciated the opportunity to work for and with my Dad, even if it was sometimes a little challenging being a daughter and employee all at once. I worked so hard, not only because I wanted to do a good job, but because I wanted to make my Dad proud.

After graduating from UM, my first career job was as a marketing-advertising sales consultant at the *Missoulian* daily newspaper. Jerry and I were married in Missoula in August of 1992. During the week leading up to the wedding, we had spectacular weather. But on the day of our wedding, on Aug. 22, it snowed and was only 32 degrees. It was the coldest Aug. 22 ever recorded in Missoula's history.

When our wedding came to a close and all the guests were gone and headed to the reception, Jerry and I waited outside in the falling snow for the limo driver to arrive. He was a No Show. My Dad came to the rescue. He stopped and bought us a bottle of champagne and proceeded to take us on a scenic drive through Missoula while Jerry and I sipped champagne in the backseat. My Dad's chauffeuring us around in the falling snow was way more meaningful than any experience a hired limo driver could have provided, and I will forever cherish the memory.

In December of 1992, Jerry and I had been married for three months. He had a teaching degree he wanted to use but had just finished his time in the Air Force and by the time he moved from Dayton, OH, to Missoula, there were no teaching jobs available. So on Christmas day of 1992, we loaded up the U-Haul truck and moved to Winner, South Dakota to be co-publishers of the newspaper there. We worked hard to expand the newspaper, and we were successful at doing that, but it was also one of my most challenging experiences. I missed the mountains, and after two years, Jerry and I were both ready for a new challenge.

In Partnership

In Spring of 1994, we moved to Gardiner, MT, to start our first business, Yellowstone Journal Corporation. We couldn't have done this without the financial support and expertise of my parents who were partners in the business. We were printing the five editions of *Yellowstone Journal* on my parents' printing press in Lander, and Jerry really wanted to teach, so in 1995, we moved to Lander. Fortunately, soon after arriving in Lander, Jerry was hired by the school district for a long-term substitute position. The following Fall, he was hired as a full-time teacher, and he has been teaching in Lander ever since. (Jerry's now in his 29th year of teaching.)

I loved being back in my hometown. After being away for almost 10 years, I had a new appreciation for Lander, and it was wonderful to be near my parents and my brother, who was a teenager at the time.

My years in Montana had turned me into quite an outdoor enthusiast and fortunately, Jerry had taken to the mountains, too. We spent our evenings and most every weekend mountain biking, hiking and backpacking, camping, snowboarding, and skiing in the mountains above Lander.

Jerry and I knew we wanted to have a family but waited seven years before starting one. Unfortunately, my first pregnancy ended in a miscarriage. We were devastated by the loss. My doctor recommended waiting a year before we tried again, so feeling heartbroken and discouraged, Jerry and I took up ultrarunning. (When I met Jerry he was a marathon runner. He had run 4 marathons.) We spent the next handful of years training in the foothills and mountains above town, and traveling to exciting destinations to participate in ultras.

Our “Epic Pit Crew”

My parents were invaluable support. We called them our “Epic pit crew.” Once we started our family and had little boys in tow, my parents traveled with us to care for and spend time with the boys while cheering and crewing for Jerry and I during our various events.

My parents loved Hawaii, particularly Maui and the Big Island, and my Dad told us about a race in Maui called *The Run to the Sun*, which was a 37-mile ascent of the volcano, Haleakala. It started at sea level, and topped out at over 10,000 feet.

My Dad acted as tour guide and we made such lasting memories on that first trip to Hawaii. We had only two sons at the time, Wolf, who was 4, and Hayden, who was 2. My parents doted on and cared for the boys while driving up the Haleakala switchbacks during the race, cheering out the window as Jerry and I slogged up the countless switchbacks. I didn’t fare so well, physically. I had all kinds of stomach issues and made it only to the marathon mark before I had to bail. (Jerry made it all the way to the end, running 37.2 miles, with still some left over in his tank.)

I’ll never forget my parents’ support during that event. After I bailed at 26 miles, I climbed into the passenger seat of the rental van. Wolf and Hayden were in the far backseat and my Mom sat in the seat behind me with her arms around my shoulders from behind as she held a paper sack in front of me to barf in. I had consumed so much fresh pineapple at all of the aid stations during the race, and the heat and hairpin turns in the van caused me to throw it all up.

It wasn’t pretty. In fact it was horrific! At some point there was pineapple “sprayed” all over the dashboard, and through all the chaos, my Dad was such a good sport, managing to keep the van on the road and still able to cheer and provide support for Jerry, who was in the most difficult stages of his race. My Dad just rolled with the punches (and flying pineapple chunks) as my Mom and the boys giggled at the scene of it all. Once we met Jerry at the end/top, we had to descend all of the hairpin switchbacks again, and well, I had eaten a world record amount of pineapple, so this went on for the duration of the van ride.

When we finally got down off the Volcano, my dad drove us directly to a car wash, where he ordered everyone out of the car. He then proceeded to drive the van through the car wash—with all of the van’s doors and windows open—in an effort to power wash away all of the pineapple.

After we all made it through the ordeal, we flew to the Big Island, which at the time was one of my parents’ most favorite places on Earth. They had been traveling there for some time and staying at the Hilton Waikoloa. We had seen photos and heard much about the paradise they had grown to love so much. Since we had worked so hard running 26 and 37 miles in Maui, we figured we deserved some lounging and rewarded ourselves by joining them at the Hilton Waikoloa.

It was such a meaningful and fun trip, and the boys were so spoiled at the Hilton Waikoloa, that for years following, whenever the boys asked for something that seemed extravagant or excessive, we’d say, “What do you think this is, the Hilton Waikoloa?”

Another time, my parents traveled to Lake Tahoe to help with the boys and to help Jerry crew for me during my attempt at the 50-mile Tahoe Rim Trail race. Temperatures were unusually high beginning early in the day and the heat was a major factor for me. I was doing pretty well, making the necessary time cutoffs, but by mile 42, I was shivering despite running in 90-degree heat and was starting to hallucinate, so I decided to call it quits.

I was in such a sorry state, and had a severe craving for salty foods. Despite drinking chicken broth and eating crackers and other salty snacks at the aid station, I couldn't get enough. I needed more salt. Once out of the race, my Dad came to the rescue by ordering two huge buckets of crispy Kentucky Fried Chicken. I remember hunching over my very own bucket as I shoved chicken into my grease-covered face. My parents and family cared so well for me as I recovered and I truly am grateful for those memories and the loving crew and care during those physically challenging events.

Support

Our first son, Wolf, was born about six weeks ahead of schedule. For most of my pregnancy, Wolf had been in a breech position and during a check-up when the doctor worked to turn him, it was discovered that my amniotic fluid was lower than it should have been. After another checkup a few days later it was decided it would be best to not delay Wolf's birth any longer and for me to have a C-section. At the time, Lander's hospital had an excellent Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, so once Wolf arrived, he was in great hands, but it would be 13 days before we could take him home. That was a stressful and hard time, not being able to hold our Wolf for the first few days after his birth, and my parents' constant and loving support was such a huge and significant help.

When our second son, Hayden, was born, my parents swooped in again and were there around the clock to take care of Wolf, and to be on hand during Hayden's early days to offer us support, and to dote on their newest grandson.

Five years later, I gave birth to our youngest son, Finis (Fin) and although he was plenty big, his breathing was labored. There was no longer a NIC unit at our hospital so hours after Fin's birth, he and I were life-flighted to Denver so Fin could receive more advanced care for his lungs, which needed a little more time to finish developing. Once again, my Dad came to the rescue. He rearranged his schedule and he and my mom drove Jerry, Wolf, and Hayden to meet us in Denver.

A funny side story about that trip. When they were making the trip to Denver, in the middle of nowhere, Wyoming, Wolf (whom we all affectionately called "Wolfie" at the time) needed to go to the bathroom. My dad walked Wolfie out through the sagebrush, away from the car and highway so he could relieve himself. When Wolfie returned, he told my Dad that it had been a profitable endeavor. He had "made some money" during his pit stop. He must have gone to the bathroom where someone previously had, and the person must have inadvertently emptied the change from his pockets, because Wolfie returned with a handful of coins.

My parents also provided a lot of support and help with the boys during some years when Jerry had to have some major spine surgeries. Jerry had suffered some neck injuries as a walk-on on the Nebraska Cornhusker football team in college, and also learned in 2001 that he has a degenerative spine condition. As a result, between 2001-2010, Jerry had four fusions, two on his cervical spine and two on his lumbar spine. (He is doing amazing and has been ever since his last operation, due largely to his dedication to his health and fitness.) My parents were such a help during those surgeries and trips. They traveled with us to Salt Lake City for each of the surgeries and were such a tremendous help with our sons, and were a big support to Jerry and I. We'll always be grateful.

Moviegoing

One of the things I love most about my Dad is his role as “Poppop.” He has all kinds of traditions with his grandkids and because we live in the same town, our boys really hit the jackpot. My Dad is a long-time movie buff, and he started a tradition when the boys were toddlers, that continues today, although a lot less frequently given the boys’ ages and the fact that two are launched and no longer living in Lander. For years, he would pick the boys up in his convertible, with the top down, and take them to see a movie.



Among other things, my Dad taught them to go extra early so they could be assured to get their favorite seats, which were in the center of the third row from the front. And not only that, my Dad raised them to ask that fresh popcorn be made (if the supply was down to the last overly-yellow kernels.) A funny side bit: One time my Dad asked our youngest son if he could have one of his Red Vines, and after thinking about it for some time, Fin offered him the one that he was eating that was half consumed.

All these years later, Wolf, Hayden, and Fin all have a deep love of movies and this is no doubt in large part due to this moviegoing tradition with their Poppop.

Spring Break Travels

Over the years we invited my parents to join us on many of our Spring Break road trips through southern Utah’s national and state parks, and to the Grand Canyon. One time we met in Canyonlands National Park for Easter. My Dad, who for about 50 years now has been the Easter Bunny in charge of hiding Easter Eggs for his family, hid like 100 eggs that my mom had boiled and decorated before the trip, among the junipers and rocks near our campsite. It was one of the most epic Easter Egg hunts the boys have ever had.

Often during these spring break trips, my parents would offer to take care of the boys and take them sightseeing and on their own adventures while Jerry and I enjoyed a sunrise-to-sunset epic hike. We enjoyed so many of these hikes, which provided us with meaningful one-on-one time. It was a win-win because my boys cherished the time with their Mommom and Poppop, not to mention it meant they, for once, got out of hiking!

One time we were at one of our favorite places, Utah’s Goblin Valley State Park. My parents had their big, fancy RV and we were in the spot next to them with our tent, which was comparably meager. A huge wind storm, with rain and hail came up, so Jerry and I quickly packed up the tent and we all took refuge in my parents’ RV, which has 3 large screen TVs. I can still remember the scene so vividly. The boys enjoyed a hilarious movie with their Poppop and Jerry. They were all laughing hysterically as they watched, while my mom and I played Scrabble. At the same time, we watched as campers all around us were trying to hold down their tents and chasing after supplies in the awful storm. That sorta ruined the boys, as far as tent camping goes—at least whenever their Mommom and Poppop were along, and had their RV.

Time at Flaming Gorge

When our boys were young, we spent many summer weekends on Flaming Gorge with my parents. At the time, we had a pontoon and a slip there and loved taking our camper to Lucerne Valley Marina. My parents had a cabin cruiser boat and a slip and spent a lot of their free time there. We’d meet them there and spend the days on the water with them, during which the boys preferred to be on “the castle boat” and not the pontoon. And then, sunburned and tired from a day on the lake, we’d all descend to our campsite where we spent evenings having a barbecue dinner, and following it up with a campfire and s’mores, and capping the night by looking for

constellations in the star-filled skies. We have so many priceless memories from these experiences at Flaming Gorge with my parents.

The Stars

Growing up, it was my Dad that taught me about the stars and how to locate the major constellations. Over the years, whenever there has been a major meteor show or other constellation event, we set the alarm for the wee hours of the morning and hauled the kids over to my parents' house to lay on our backs on their deck and watch the sky. And whenever I look at the night sky and try to locate the various constellations, I think of my Dad.

Steaks

For as long as I can remember, my dad has loved grilling and he's a master when it comes to grilling steaks. For years he has grilled "Poppop's famous steaks" for our boys. He raised our boys to prefer their steaks medium rare or rare, and the tradition continues. Often during summer, on Sundays when we go to my parents to play cornhole, my Dad makes the Johnson boys huge



steaks that take up their whole plates. That's all they eat is a giant rare steak (or two), and they couldn't be happier. Sometimes, while the steaks are on the grill, the boys will enjoy an appetizer of canned mussels with their Poppop.

A Brilliant Plan

This is a funny memory I have about a "brilliant plan" my Dad had. My Mom and Dad are both from Iowa so for years, while growing up, our annual vacation meant a roadtrip to Iowa. We loved being in Iowa and getting to spend time with our grandparents, aunts and uncles, and our cousins, who we loved so much! All the trips to Iowa and the time we spent with our cousins are some of my favorite childhood memories.

But we didn't love—and in fact we dreaded—the "journey" portion of the trip.

And boy was it a journey. It was 15 hours in a hot car, packed snugly in the backseat with my two sisters, and our baby brother. My Dad reminds me to this day of my particular impatience when it came to these marathon trips in the car and how we wouldn't be 10 miles out of Lander and I'd be asking, "How much farther?!"

One summer evening, during a family dinner at a picnic table in our backyard a few nights before we were to make the annual trip, my Dad announced an idea he had pertaining to our upcoming trip. He called it a "brilliant plan" and asked for our attention.

"This year, we'll leave for Iowa in the middle of the night. At midnight. That way we'll get our dark miles behind us while we're still fresh and awake."

And, as if he wanted to make sure the deal could be closed, he continued, "We'll have a lot less traffic to contend with during the night, and plus, we now have 4 drivers." He paused before adding, "Which is a lot."

It sounded reasonable. And we were all in favor of anything that might help make the upcoming trip-from-hell less miserable. So our response to my Dad's brilliant plan was favorable. We all thought it sounded great and said as much

The time came to leave a few days later, at midnight and we drove away from our house in the dark. Mom and Dad had made us all go to bed at 7:30 p.m. that evening so we could get some quality sleep in before our departure at midnight. But teens do not easily sleep at that early hour.

As we left town, Dad boasted to us about how we could probably keep the car's high beam lights on all night since "I'm sure no one else is doing what we're doing."

We hadn't even made it to the Lions Valley turnoff (three miles beyond the city limits) and my Dad reported he was feeling "too sleepy to safely drive." (In fairness to my Dad, we lived in the country, about three miles out of town at that time, so he had actually driven 6-7 miles when this happened.)

My Dad said he was sorry, but someone else would have to drive the first stretch.

He pulled the car over to the shoulder and once we were stopped, he opened the driver's side door. Before he got out, he turned to my mom and the two of us kids—my older sister and me—who were among the licensed drivers and asked, "Which driver's up next?"

None of us was too eager but it was clear it would no longer be my Dad and the rest of us would have to figure it out and take it from there.

My Dad climbed out of the car and waited for another driver to volunteer and for another seat to clear out for him. After still nobody offered to drive, he walked around the front of the car and as he did so he motioned to my mom to move over into the driver's seat. He climbed into the shotgun position and scooped his hip against my mom's and lightly bumped her over—inchd her over—to the driver's seat. My mom didn't argue and slid into position. She would be the driver.

And just like that, my Dad was settled into the shotgun position with his head sunk into the pillow he had propped against the window, and by all indications, was fast asleep. It's possibly not an embellishment to say my Dad was snoring before my Mom had even put the car into *Drive*.

Well, things seemed like they were going well, for at least a couple of minutes, until my Mom shared, loudly and firmly, "Well, shoot, looks like that's all I can do. I think I'm too tired to drive. I'm fighting to keep my eyes open. So who's up next?" my mom said loudly, as she pulled the car over to the shoulder of the road.

She opened the driver's side door and asked Lish or I who would be the next to drive.

My mom stood in the road as she waited for someone else to take over. I was 16 at the time and had only recently got my driver's license so it felt natural that my older sister, Alicia, was the most natural pick. I remember thinking that my mom should be careful standing in the road like that but then I remembered it was the middle of the night and no one would probably be driving up the highway.

(Let the record show my Dad was right about that.)

Because I was the newest, youngest driver, I felt I should let my older sister, Alicia (Lish), take over. As if right on cue, Lish volunteered and she and my Mom traded seats.

It appeared Lish would be the winning ticket. About 20 minutes had passed, and she was still driving and there hadn't been another driver change. At this point, I was the only one awake other than Lish.

Unfortunately that wouldn't be the case for long. By the 30-minute mark, Lish was done. This was confirmed as Lish waved her arm to get my attention as she looked at me in the center rear-view window. Surrounded by the bobbing heads of our snoozing (and in some cases snoring) passengers, Lish used her eyes to try to act out her message to me. She acted as if her eyelids couldn't stay open.

It wasn't hard to decipher her message. She was done driving. She couldn't safely continue.

With no choice left but for me to offer to take the wheel, I obliged. I looked at her in the mirror and nodded my head and reluctantly, I gave her a thumbs up. Alicia pulled the car to the side of the road, and we quietly switched positions.

Now, everyone's sleeping, passionately. Two are snoring and all of them have such peaceful expressions I can only expect they're experiencing that deep bliss of lala land.

(I forgot to mention earlier, but my little brother, Michael, 3, and youngest sister, Amber, 13, have been sleeping like babies the whole time, completely unaware of our frequent starts and stops and driver-switches.)

So now, I'm the Driver and we're headed down the highway. I turn up the music a little that's playing from the FM radio, and I tell myself to "Focus. You can do this" and "Be alert."

I go for some minutes before seeing a sign warning me to slow down to 40 miles per hour.

We're about to enter Jeffrey City, a former uranium mining boomtown that is today mostly empty, except for several vacated buildings and shuttered businesses—the abandoned remains of a place that was once bustling. There's no sign of life in Jeffrey City, or in our car for that matter.

I'm having a hard time. It's taking every ounce of my will to keep my eyelids from closing. I'm also not a reliable driver..

I say loudly to the sleepy passengers, "I'm sorry, but I can't keep going," hoping it's loud enough to wake at least one of my family members. "I think it's too risky for me to continue because I'm fighting falling asleep."

To which there was no response. It's obvious that none of the previous drivers were lying about being tired, Everyone's in a deep slumber.

So I pull the car over at the end of the town and park along the side of a gray cinder block building, where a blinking red neon 'B A R' sign hangs.

I turn the car off and nudge my Dad's elbow. He's been sleeping since he gave up his post and settled into his pillow against the window in the front passenger seat. I feel nervous about having to wake him up and wish I didn't have to, but if we're going to get to Iowa, I have no choice..

"Dad. Dad." I say, louder each time. Finally, I say it as loudly as I can without yelling, and while pushing his arm, "Dad!" He tosses and turns before finally opening his eyes and looking at me. By now, everyone in the car is shifting in their seats and waking up.

I explain, "We've gone through all of our drivers. After you were done, Mom, Lish and me all took our turns driving and it turns out none of us is awake enough to safely drive."

Trying to soften the blow, I add, "But we made it to Jeffrey City."

Disbelief was in my Dad's eyes. He looked at me, and then he slowly turned his head to the backseat and looked individually at my sisters and brother and my mom, who were all now awake, and except for my brother and sister Amber, were not in their original positions. Which seemed to add to the confusion my Dad was experiencing while coming out of his slumber.

It was then so quiet you could hear a pin drop, and all of us knew what would come next would not be good. Dad looked angry.

As we all waited for what would come from my Dad, he looked as if he was trying to discern if he was dreaming this or if it was really happening.

Then, my Dad recited, as if in confirmation before deciding how to proceed with us, loudly, "We're in Jeffrey City?"

We all nod, but have enough sense to not say or add anything else.

Then my dad made an effort to meet the eyes of each of us drivers, who were all wide awake by now thanks to the raucousness that had penetrated the group's previously peaceful and slumberous state.

Finding it impossible to contain himself, my Dad exclaimed, "Let me see if I have this straight. You're telling me that we're only 56 miles from home and everyone has driven?"

Scared, and bracing, we all nod.

Then my Dad threw his pillow down on the floor by his feet, opened his door, huffed loudly and got out of the car. He looked at all of us again, disapprovingly and then slammed the door so hard that the whole car and all of us in it, rocked.

My Dad turned his back to us with an expression that said something like "Thanks for nothing" and he walked toward the Godforsaken wasteland cursing out loud and letting a load off to the sky and the stars and anyone in the universe who might be able to hear him. Then he drank some coffee and drove us to Iowa.

Since that experience 39 years ago, every time I hear someone reference "a brilliant plan," I smile, and think fondly of my Dad, even if I can't help but feel a little skeptical. 😊

But there was this one time...

But that's not to say my Dad didn't have other plans that were in fact brilliant. Like the time when I was in high school and I slept through my alarm, missing the bus to my track meet, and my Dad flew me there in his airplane.

Additional Gratitudes...

There is so much more I can say about my Dad, and most of them are things I'm grateful to him for. They include the following.

My Dad raised us to arrive extra early. I always go to the airport (excessively) early, and as a result, even as much as I travel, and as much as my family travels, we've never missed a flight. I (we) have my Dad to thank for this.

My Dad taught me how to juggle, literally, and also all the things that matter in my life.

My Dad has instilled in me the importance of attending funerals and paying our respects when someone we know or love passes.

My Dad provided me with my first job, stuffing newspapers.

My Dad raised me to be safe and to take precautions, including the importance of using seat belts, wearing a life jacket whenever near a body of water, wearing a helmet when biking, turning on my headlights when driving on the highway, and to not get “boxed in” while passing a semi truck on the interstate.

Thank you, Dad, for all those years of downhill skiing at Jackson Hole and Grand Targhee resorts. (And thanks for buckling our ski boots all those years!) Those trips are some of my most cherished childhood memories.

My Dad introduced me to cross-country skiing, which today is one of my biggest passions and gets me through our long Winters in Wyoming. One Winter, my grandparents on my mom’s side were in town for a visit and my Dad organized an afternoon of cross-country skiing in Sinks Canyon. Everyone in our family rented cross-country ski gear from the local sporting goods store. Unfortunately, the shop didn’t have cross-country skis or boots that were small enough for me or my younger sister, Amber, so my Dad had us wear our downhill skis and boots. For cross-country skiing!

Speaking of that, thanks Dad, for my big, muscular calf muscles!

Thanks, Dad, for my first plane ride, when I was in sixth grade, and you took all of us to Disney World.

My Dad’s a great joke teller and storyteller. He’s one of the best!

Thank you, Dad, for being such a dreamer and for passing on that gift to me.

Thank you for all the epic Bloody Mary’s and Margaritas you’ve made for me during my adult life over the years.

Thank you, Dad, for the gift of curiosity and for inspiring me to ask questions.

Thank you for the gift of illegible handwriting. I write just like my Dad and can seldom make out what I jot down.

Thank you, Dad, for giving me so many things while growing up. I remember sitting on the front step with you when I was four years old and we watched as my older sister raced up and down Wind River Street on her bike with the neighbor kids. I wanted to join in the fun so badly but didn’t yet have, or know how to ride, a bike. Over the course of the following days, I begged and begged you to get me a bike and finally, you relented. You were often not an easy sell, and I always knew what I wanted and usually, I wanted it badly, so it’s perhaps no wonder that not long after I talked you into a bike, you started calling me your “Little Miss Nag.”

Thank you for my first car, the dark purple 1966 Oldsmobile Toronado that we called the “Battlestar Galactica.” It was quite a spectacle. I remember when driving on the hilly Tweed Lane, the car’s body was so big and long that those of us in the front seat would be over the crest of a hill while my friends in the backseat were still going up the hill. It was also a particularly challenging car to parallel park.

Thank you for being such a wonderful “Poppop” to our boys, and to all of your grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Thank you for taking such good care of Mom, especially in recent years.

Thank you for the gift of my life, for your support and love and friendship over the years, and for being my Dad.

Happy 78th birthday! I love you so much!!!

#