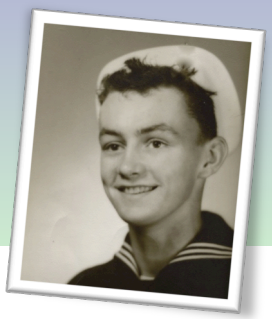
The toast given at the celebration of Jack & Pat's 50th Wedding Anniversary

July 9, 2007



Being the oldest child in the family has its pros and cons. On the pro side, there are more photographs of me as a baby and toddler than my brother and sister combined.

On the con side, I was the practice baby. Mom and Dad made all their parenting mistakes on me, and were also the strictest with me. They got progressively more lenient with my sister and by the time my brother was born it was, "hey Kid, here's fifty bucks, go play."

But I'm not bitter because definitely one of the pros tonight of being the eldest is the opportunity to give a toast in celebration of my parents' 50th wedding anniversary. And I am so glad that the people my parents hold close to their heart are able to join us tonight in this celebration. Some of you have come from quite a ways to be here this evening, and I would like to say thank you for your travels. I'd also like to welcome the newest member of our family tonight, and say Steve, I'm so glad that you have found us all, so welcome to you also.

I know I speak for my brother and sister when I say that the older we get, the more we realize how lucky we are to be part of this family, and what a privilege it has been to have parents like mom and dad. I am 48 years old and never, in my entire life, have I heard my parents say an unkind word to each other or about each other. That is remarkable. Their love for each other has always been there, an unshakeable foundation we built our family upon. And I'll tell you, we needed that foundation sometimes, because our family has been through quite a lot of interesting times living overseas, including monsoons, earthquakes, hurricanes, locusts, sandstorms, floods, a war, bomb threats, an evacuation, and blackouts when bomber planes were flying over us. I also know that we'll all live to a very old age because we've been inoculated for just about every disease known to man.

But don't think that it was all trial and tribulation. Far from it! I happened to mention my background to someone a few years ago, and how I moved every two years to a different country. "Oh that must have been so horrible for you," he said. "Well," I replied. "For my 9th birthday, my dad rented an elephant and then took my sister and I to visit the Taj Mahal. What did you do for your 9th birthday?"

We had an incredible upbringing. We walked through the Taj Mahal, we swam in the Ganges River, we visited the Acropolis, we boated down the river through an African jungle, and we danced under the Mediterranean stars. I know that none of us kids would have traded one second of our lives for anything. And throughout our lives, we've always been comforted by the fact that the love my parents had for each other -- their marriage -- was the most important thing in their lives. Everything else, including us kids, took a distant second. I cannot emphasize enough how wonderful it has been to observe and participate in the relationship they have with each other.

I wanted to find the words to describe this relationship, and felt that I could do no better than a poem by Walt Whitman called "Song of the Open Road"

Song of the Open Road

Listen, I will be honest with you

I do not offer the old smooth prizes

But offer rough new prizes

These are the days that must happen to you:

You shall not heap up what is called riches,

You shall scatter with lavish hand all that you earn or achieve.

However sweet the laid up stores,

However convenient the dwelling, you shall not remain there.

However sheltered the port, however calm the waters, you shall not anchor there.

However welcome the hospitality that welcomes you,

You are permitted to receive it but a little while

Afoot and lighthearted, take to the open road

Healthy, free, the world before you, the long brown path before you, leading wherever you choose

Say only to one another:

Camerado, I give you my hand!

I give you my love more precious than money; I give you myself before preaching and law:

Will you give me yourself?

Will you come travel with me?

Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?

Would all of you please raise your glass and join me in a toast to my parents. Mom and Dad, Happy 50th Anniversary, we love you to the moon and back.