

He has never met a hot dog he didn't like.



My mom and dad on their wedding day, June 23, 1956.

He will tell you he's a lucky man, and he's not wrong.

He has been blessed with four sons and a daughter, four daughter's-in-law, one son-in-law, 17 grandchildren, 5 great grandchildren and the love of a fiery Irish woman to whom he will have been married to 66 years come June 23.

This Father's Day, the best man I've ever known will be 88 years old and he will start each day with more spirit and energy than a puppy dog. He gets up early, before 7 most mornings, and he wakes up happy. He shares his sunshine with everyone within earshot - reading the newspaper aloud or turning on Sinatra at full volume and singing along with stylized versions of "Summer Wind," "New York, New York" or, on particularly bright mornings, "My Way."

My father is a man of simple tastes. He's never had a bad hot dog. "Ummmmm, good dog," he says without fail. He likes a dry martini in the evening, and if the martini comes stuffed with one of those little cocktail onions ... even better. He has never complained about a meal, never turned back a bottle of wine and never argued that a drink was too strong or too weak.

My dad has a problem with pronunciation — *pro-noon-see-a shuun*, as he might say. The wine Cabernet Sauvignon comes out *caberray, old son*. As in "I'll have a glass of caberray, old son."

The citronella candles that keep the insects away in the summer are “canneloni candles.” He confuses movie titles and celebrity names. The movie “*What About Bob?*” becomes “What ever happened to Bill?” Redford and Streisand’s “*The Way We Were*” becomes “Yesterday it was Us.” Katie Couric is forever Kathy Kerky in his world.

He remembers baseball the way it might have and should have been: when Terry Moore and Red Schoendienst and Stan Musial lived in the neighborhood and played stickball with him and his buddies in the street. He was a member of the knot hole gang and used to take in St. Louis Browns games for free.

He has no known enemies. He has no formal training in any language, not even English, but he can communicate with people of all nationalities. I’ve seen foreigners come up to him and ask him for travel directions in their native tongue. He then successfully provides the directions in a language that appears to be universal.

In everyday life he is a gentleman. But on the golf course he talks while you are swinging, walks in your putting line and even will hit your golf ball, oblivious (or so it seems) to the problems he is causing with your game. Yet his joy for the game, his naiveté about etiquette on the course and his obvious pleasure to be in the company of fellow golfers have him booked up in foursomes all summer.

My father cries a lot quicker than he used to, and angers a lot more slowly. His patience with his grandkids is remarkable, especially from the man who, as a young father wore out such phrases as “on time means 10 minutes early” “zero tolerance,” and “turn that music down!”

He truly believes — and taught me to believe — all the supposedly out-of-date lessons I’ve ever needed to live a complete life; messages like “Give your employer 10% more than they expect,” “treat everyone with respect,” “anyone can be strong when things are going good; the best people are strong when things aren’t so good,” “don’t be a phony,” “always empty your own trash,” “nobody works for you; you work together,” “you **are** your brother’s keeper,” and “you’re not smart enough to lie; nobody is.”

He did not serve in the military. He’s only an average athlete, and he has yet to save anyone from a burning building. All he did was quit high school in his teens to support his widowed mother, helped raise five kids (now all college graduates), stay married to the same woman for 66 years, worked his rear-end off in as many as three jobs at one time, pay his bills and try to be the best man he could be. Every day.

He’ll tell you that there are plenty of men out there just like him. But this particular man — this early rising singer with simple tastes and simple lessons, with the energy of a puppy, fractured English, terrible golf etiquette and unlimited patience — is my dad.

And that makes me the luckier man.

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