

Some reflections from his children

by *Linda Schlafer*

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Hello. My name is Linda and I'm the oldest of Ray Elliott's children. My brothers and sisters have asked me to represent them in making a few comments about our father. Since I'm speaking for them, I'd like to introduce them for those of you who don't know who we all are.

None of us knew our father as we were growing up or in most of our adult lives. Ray's devotion to his work, our being away at boarding school, his loyalty in attending to our mother's special needs, and his quiet, self-effacing personality all made for little personal sense of who he was or of what we meant to him. However, each of us has a few treasured memories that tell us in retrospect that he was more aware of us than we usually realized. For my sister Marsha at about age 10, this meant being the only other person awake in the car on a long road trip when my father explained to her how a car engine works. She remembers the event more than the particulars of that conversation!

My mother's first memory of my father was of his sitting in his living room with a whole dishpan full of popcorn for himself. We all enjoyed eating Dad's popcorn on Sunday evenings and his fudge on more special occasions. Until the past couple of years, these were the only two things Dad would ever do in the kitchen.

We all remember going out into the field each year to select and cut our Christmas trees.

Dad told all of us to "turn over and get to sleep" at naptimes and bedtimes.

We also share an image of Dad sitting on a child-size chair in our patio to speak with Ixil guests who came to our home to see him. The number of Ixiles who sought Dad out on his recent trip to Guatemala are a tribute to those patient hours.

Other common themes emerge as we talk about Dad. He was an avid photographer whose patience in arranging family photos far exceeded our own. We have all inherited his love of music, which I was first aware of as he played the trombone in the city marching band in his hometown of Independence, KS. Some of us remember the exotic treat of being taken to a symphony concert in Guatemala City during our visits there.

As all of you know, Dad had a dry wit and a great sense of humor, traits that tended to emerge in our childhood whenever we were socializing with other missionaries.

Dad was a craftsman who loved to carve wood. At one time in his life, he also took up cross stitch and needlepoint to help him get through long missions meetings. This rather daring act reflects the pioneering spirit he manifested in his ground-breaking life work and in many of his concepts and scripture interpretations.

My sister Karen is seventeen years younger than I am but we have identical memories of what Dad carried in his pockets. He always had 3 x 5 cards and a pen in his shirt pocket, and a small pocket knife, nail clippers, chapstick, and loose change in his pants pockets. He was able to come to the rescue in small domestic emergencies countless times with that limited standard equipment.

Our father was a life-long learner, and since we know that he is enjoying a new life right now, we imagine him as still reading, trying out new ideas, and growing in his personal and professional lives. During these last two years, Dad has invented and reinvented his life. This was his first time to live alone or make his own decisions, and all of us feel that he made excellent use of this time. He sought reconciliation and relationship with colleagues and friends and made a special effort to connect with each of his children and grandchildren. He traveled to many of our homes to visit and attend family events. Most notably, he spent a few intense weeks in August of reconnecting with his life and work in Guatemala and with his family as thirty-three of us attended the dedication of the Ixil New Testament with him.

Dad was not perfect, and he was aware of his limitations. It is a consolation to each of us in our own struggles that despite his perceived faults, the overwhelming influence of his life is of a kind and gracious man of integrity and humor who loved the Lord and devoted himself to serving God and others.

If Dad lived a gracious life, he also died a gracious death. To the limits of his ability to respond, he was thoughtful of his caregivers and attentive to visitors. During his last few cogent days, he greeted each person who came to his room in the med center with a beautiful smile before he could even get his eyes open. He showed us how to accept help when needed even as he was concerned about not giving up too soon.

In some ways, it could appear that the time and effort involved in moving him to a smaller apartment in Richardson Hall was a waste since he was only able to live there for one week. We see that rather differently. It was a dress rehearsal for his ultimate divesting himself of the things of this world to enter eternal life less encumbered. It was also his ultimate act of defining himself, as he personally chose each item that would make the move to Apartment 615. As a result, we have been living the past two weeks in a space that he furnished and it has helped us to remain close to him and to each other even as we have been saying goodbye.

So again, goodbye, Dad. We love you and we're glad you were our Dad. We see you now as singing in a heavenly choir and letting the harpists know when they are off-key. We hope you are chewing over linguistic and scriptural issues with old friends such as Uncle Cam and John Beekman. I imagine you as gathering the group of our various children who have died young or before they were born and getting to know them as you have been getting to know us. Maybe you are learning new crafts with the gold and jewels of the heavenly city. We carry you in our hearts forever with gratitude for the legacy of care you have left with us. We have one less tie to this earth and one more to the world that is to come for each of us.