

Patrick Travers

All fathers seem larger than life to their sons. Ben and I had the wonderful experience of discovering that Dad actually was a giant. We never stopped looking up to him, slightly awed by his character and abilities. He seemed able to do anything and understand everything.

Above all, Dad was a deeply good man who carried his considerable talent lightly. It has been a great comfort in recent days to learn that so many of his friends and colleagues also viewed him this way.

As the numerous stories attest, Dad was awfully funny, partly because no joke was off limits and partly because he was prepared, when necessary, to sacrifice quality for quantity. His humour stemmed from a long career as an incorrigible prankster, but also from an abiding sense of the absurd. To Dad, life was simply too important to take seriously.

Yet he was, at the core, a serious man, strongly committed to his political and ethical principles. His most important, and often repeated, piece of fatherly advice was to always fly straight. Many of our family's best moments were spent around the dinner table discussing ideas under his genial direction. This passion imbued his best writing, both as a foreign correspondent and as a columnist. It certainly spurred his lifelong engagement with Canadian democracy.

He was also fundamentally optimistic, taking particular pleasure in the idealism of a younger generation and always expecting reason to trump ideology. More importantly, he lived his principles. He spent countless hours responding to comments from readers. Our family may have been a bit envious of his time, but Dad felt it important to engage in open debate with all who crossed his path, regardless of political orientation or standing. Dad was an egalitarian, with real modesty and a distaste for pretension.

Ben Travers

There are many testaments to Dad's aversion to affectation in his public writing. Thankfully, there are many in his personal life, too. When I was in high school, some wayward friends and I relieved an Ottawa-area embassy of its treasured wood-carved national crest. It was, admittedly, an imperfect crime. So we were summoned, along with our fathers, for a tea-time lashing by the ambassador. Patronizing and didactic, the ambassador wanted to teach us all a lesson – parents included. By the time we left, Dad had made up his mind: Perhaps what we had done was no crime at all.



Dad had our backs, and with that generous, gentle ribbing with which he dealt with almost everyone, he always reminded us that none of us are all that different. I would sometimes call him if I had to interview or speak with someone by whom I felt intimidated. "Ben," he would say, "Everybody has to put their pants on in the morning, one leg at a time."

Dad was loyal, loving, and the source of that indefinite sense of fatherly security that wherever, whenever we were lost, confused, or just looking for a laugh, he would be there with insight, and sometimes a tasteless joke. He would even take our calls for lengthy chats on column writing days. Then again, he was a writer. He probably liked an excuse not to face the page. But the point is, like the Dude's rug in one of his favourite movies, *The Big Lebowski*, he really tied our world together.

More than that, he made it fun. He often wore socks on his ears at breakfast. And one memorable Halloween, when he was the Editor of the Ottawa Citizen, he commandeered the newspaper's yellow promotional go-kart - typically used at Ottawa Lynx games - so that Paddy and I could careen through the crowds of candy-toting toddlers.

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We have another favourite memory. One March break, when Mom was starting a new job, Dad, Ben and I took a boys road trip to South Carolina. Every time we hit the highway he would blast "Start Me Up" by the Rolling Stones. We'd break out the rubber animal noses that he'd bought for us and make faces at the cars that he was almost always passing. This puckish sense of fun was never far away.

My version of Ben's story about the embassy crest involves getting kicked out of camp one summer for sneaking around after dark to see the girls. I was young and it seemed like a big deal. Dad wasn't exactly pleased, but he never failed to support us in difficult times. I only learned later that he was also slyly proud to see me carry on a family tradition. My mother attended an all-girls' camp in Muskoka, which I think he took as a challenge. Lights off, he once drove his battered Porsche through the woods to spring her for an illicit weekend in Georgian Bay.

It was just one of many adventurous moments our parents shared. They met at 13, became high-school sweethearts, travelled the world, and celebrated 40 years of marriage. It is a rare and remarkable story. They faced life together, especially as parents. Our upbringing was incredibly warm, but, in retrospect, our days in Harare and Nicosia, which have always been at the heart of our family life, must have also been quite difficult.

Dad would disappear without notice, called away in a rickety plane to a remote war zone. Mom would be left at home raising two sons in a new country, no doubt deeply worried. It is a testament to both my parents that Ben and I had no idea at the time and that they overcame every obstacle in their lives with grace and commitment. He was not only a kind and generous man, but also a loyal brother, great father, and wonderful husband.

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Dad's death was for us, as it was for many, a shock. So, too, was the overwhelming response and the many heartfelt tributes paid to him by his colleagues and his readers, and by so many people he respected and admired. He might have wittily reproached us if he saw what we've done to honour him tonight. Dad was low-key. But deep down, I think we all know he'd be glowing. And for us, it has been an immeasurable comfort to know that he gave so much of his big, mischievous heart to so many of you as well.

Many in this room were his dear friends. Some, even dearer targets! Regardless, you were all an indispensable part of his life. On behalf of our family, our deepest gratitude to all of you for being here, for the good times you gave him and for your kindness.

Every person has their own way of being in the world, and of seeing it, too. For Mom, Paddy and I, not exactly unbiased sources, Dad's vision and ethos are irreplaceable. One of his favourite lines was from the Leonard Cohen song "Anthem." Cohen sings: "There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in." It seemed to me that Dad saw a lot of the darkness – the folly and the heartache – but he had an uncanny ability to spot the cracks, as well. Some of it was his huge intellect. Much of it was that indomitable, irreverent sense of humour.

In that vein, Dad had an arsenal of snappy, and sometimes obtuse and seemingly ancient, sayings he'd like to use. One that we heard all too recently was a particular favourite of his: How can I miss you if you never go away? Dad, we already do miss you dearly – a magician of the spooky art and someone who let the light in. We'll carry you with us always, and we'll take solace that after a life of telling stories, your own was a pretty damn good one.