

Cyril Edward Kearl's Eulogy

July 26, 2008

Thank you all for coming to help us remember the life of Cyril Edward Kearl. My name is Alan Kearl and I am Edward's youngest sibling. He is survived by his daughters, Sarah Murphy and her husband Sam and two children Sean and Seth of Shreveport, LA, Maureen of Arlington, VA and Chase of Memphis, TN. His wife Susan Menzel Kearl predeceased him by three years. He is also survived by his mother-in-law, June Menzel, his four siblings, two siblings-in-law and a very large, extended family.

I'm sure we have all said or heard something like, "What a shame so and so died so suddenly, and s/he wasn't even that old". This could certainly be said of Ed. In a mean twist of fate to our mortal minds, speaking and thinking of him in the present tense just a few short days ago---we know we've been robbed. His passing was too soon for us all.

In fact, he was to have left a week ago today for a driving trip across country for a reunion in northern Utah, where his children and grandchildren were to meet him. In addition to just plain relaxation and enjoying each other's company, they were going to spread Sue's ashes at a favorite Rocky Mountain lake and visit Yellowstone National Park. In fact his daughter Sarah and her family were enroute when the sad news came and her trip took an unexpected turn.

Ed was born June 10, 1947 in Ann Arbor, Michigan and was the first child of Cyril Max Kearl and Mary Francis Walker. Edward was at the forefront of the baby boom generation. At the time Edward was born, his father was completing his college coursework in Mechanical Engineering at the University of Michigan. He was a much anticipated addition to the family and was the first grandchild of his maternal grandparents and named for his maternal grandfather.

When Ed was not quite two, the family moved to Erie, PA where his father took his first job with The General Electric Company.

In 1950 his brother Gary was born followed a year later by Marty, and a year later a sister, Jamie. Later the family moved to Louisville KY where I joined the family.

Like many in the post WW II era, thanks to the GI Bill and improved communication and transportation, Edward's parents left their Mountain West origins and adapted well to the Midwest.

How can a 10 or 15 minute summation of someone's life be anything but trite? As with most of us, Ed was a complex person with strong characteristics, nuanced by eccentricities and inconsistencies. He had many interesting facets. Many of the traits you may have known him for, were there early on in life. For instance:

- Ed was precocious by nature and loved to tease those he loved. One summer the family made its usual trek to Utah, but because his dad didn't have much vacation, he stayed at home working for two weeks before joining them. This summer, Ed was twelve and stayed home with his dad. Ed decided to make his dad's lunch one day. When it came time to eat and his dad opened his lunch bag, some jelly beans rolled out onto the table. It turned out that Ed had made his dad a peanut butter and jelly bean sandwich. His father's co-workers got a big laugh and never forgot it.
- In spite of a somewhat crusty exterior, Ed had a big heart and love for his family. For a time, they lived only one block from the General Electric plant his father worked at. One day his mother was surprised to come to the door and see the plant guard there with Edward, no more than four years old. He had followed his dad to work because he didn't get his morning good-bye kiss.
- If you were around Ed, you figured out pretty quickly, that interactions with him were usually on his terms. Also at a young age, his mother left the house to get the mail one wintry day. When she returned, Ed had locked the door and she didn't have but a sweater on to protect her from the cold. She begged him to turn the door and unlock it, but he kept saying, "I can't." Just when she was ready to break the window with a rock, he finally relented and opened the door.
- Ed was one of the smartest people I know. He learned to read at age three and impressed friends and neighbors with his abilities. One of his favorite stories at an early age was the story of the Gingerbread man. One day he ran outside as his mother called to him. He called over his shoulder, "you can't catch me, I'm the gingerbread man. I can run away from you, I can, I can." and he did.
- Throughout life, he enjoyed good food. While he may have enjoyed it, he seemed to struggle with the act of actually preparing it. One day he decided to make a cake for dessert. He read the abbreviation "bp" in his mother's cookbook at black pepper instead of baking powder. The cake looked like a pancake and tasted like a Mexican pastry.
- Ed was pretty head-strong. One time in high school, as a part of football training, he had to run around the track. In those days the track was coated with cinders. He knew he could run faster if he ran without his shoes or socks and proceeded to run the distance barefoot. In what must have been a painful trip to the doctor the next day to have the cinders picked from the soles of his feet, he continued to stand by his decision to run as fast as he could.

In the Kearn family education and extra curricular activities were strongly encouraged. As he moved from childhood to adolescence, Ed took music lessons, voice lessons, was active in the Boy Scouts, played football and had his share of money-earning ventures. In one such venture our father wanted his sons to learn the art of small business. They

designed and built a small insulated cooler that they attached to a bicycle frame. In an elaborate scheme, our mother would travel some distance to a wholesale dairy and purchase ice cream for the week. Ed and his brothers, Gary and Marty were to sell it and she'd go back the next week for more. It seemed like a good plan and intending for the profits to pay for the subsequent ice cream supply, an accounting was asked for. It seems the three boys were eating the profits and the venture was short-lived.

During his high school years Ed was a charismatic class member involved in all aspects of Wagoner High School in Louisville. Of particular note was his portrayal of Little Egypt in a song and dance review. As I read an excerpt of the words, picture a hefty 17 year old Ed and you can imagine why he stole the show:

She had a ruby on her tummy and
a diamond big as Texas on her toe, wo wo.
She let her hair down and
she did the hoochie koochie real slow, wo wo,
When she did her special number on a zebra skin,
I thought she'd stop the show, wo wo,
singing, "Yeah yeah! Yeah yeah! Yeah yeah! Yeah yeah!".

She did a triple somersault and when she hit the ground,
she winked at the audience and then she turned around.
She had a picture of a cowboy tattooed on her spine,
saying Phoenix, Arizona, nineteen forty-nine.
singing, "Yeah yeah! Yeah yeah! Yeah yeah! Yeah yeah!".

During those years, he tried his parent's patience with sneaking out of church, smoking the forbidden cigarette, and indulging in other teenage temptations of the era. Although he caused his mother more than one sleepless night, while trying to define who he was and who he would become, he had a deep love for his parents.

As Edward completed high school he decided to attend Cornell University and study in the prestigious labor relations program. Viet Nam and the Civil Rights movement were all around him. After a disappointing first year (he only got a B average!!) he decided to work for a year. As the US involvement in Viet Nam intensified and holding a low draft number, joining the war effort seemed a foregone conclusion. Despite the increasing unpopularity of the war and the numerous draft dodgers, he felt it was his responsibility to serve and joined the army. A promised placement in medic school faded and instead he was sent to Cooks and Baker's school and reported to Fr. Leonard Wood in Missouri in 1969. To avoid Viet Nam, he applied for Officer's Training School and reported to Ft. Benning, Georgia. He graduated 8th in his class and went back to Cooks and Baker's school as an instructor. Eventually he volunteered for a tour of duty in Viet Nam. During his six months there, he was wounded twice. The second time he came home on a stretcher, and as the only survivor of an advanced search and destroy mission in the Central Highlands, he didn't want to talk about what happened. After several operations

and months in various military hospitals he was medically retired from the Army and suffered various residual effects for the rest of his life.

As he resumed normal life in the states, his family was living the Chicago suburb of Wheaton, Illinois and soon he would realize that in the neighboring town of Glen Ellen, lived a beautiful redhead named Susan Menzel who he met at a party thrown by a mutual friend. In June of 1971 they were married and set off for Ithaca and Ed's last year at Cornell to start their lives together. In 1972 they moved to Queens. Sue worked for the Social Security Administration and Ed became an administrative aide to the president of a local hospital workers labor union. He also drove cab nights and weekends to make ends meet.

Sue's level headed, calm outlook on life was a perfect counterbalance to Ed's feisty headstrong personality. And together they enjoyed eating fine food, watching good movies, reading books, and always had room for some lost soul in their lives. Their generosity began when they were poor and continued to the day they died. They were absolutely color-blind to social, racial, religious, political, or sexual orientation – everyone in their diverse milieu could become their friend.

Later they relocated to Baltimore, Maryland. Ed pursued Phd studies in Economics, at the University of Maryland while working for the Army Research Institute. Sue continued with the Social Security Administration. They bought a row house in downtown Baltimore that became a never-ending renovation project that often included Ed's siblings and both sets of parents. While there Sarah, Maureen, and Chase were born. Ed and Sue were doting, devoted, proud parents who carried on the high standards of education and extra curricular activities promoted in the generations before. Hockey, music, LaCrosse were some of the favorites.

After years of three hour commutes and private school tuitions, they moved to Vienna, VA and had a big house with a large yard on the lovely W&OD bike trail. It was a place that didn't need new plumbing or roof, or other major renovations. This gave them even more time to be involved in their children's school and sport activities.

As Chase prepared to graduate from high school and just a few years before retirement, the Navy recruiting command, which Ed moved to in 1991, relocated to Memphis, Tennessee, and we in the family like to tease Ed that he had become an Elvis fan. In keeping with the close knit family Ed and Sue had created, all three of their adult children relocated so they could be near their parents. Sarah had married Sam Murphy by then and he was welcomed as a son and loved like one of the children. Together he and Sarah brought new joy to Ed and Sue with the births of Sean and Seth, whose lively little personalities cheered up their new Memphis home, even when the devastating news of Sue's Ovarian Cancer was discovered. The two years of Sue's illness was hard on everyone, but especially Ed, who seemed to be lost knowing he would lose her, and indeed he did almost three years ago. But despite this great hole in his life, he picked up, planned vacations for his children, and found new friends and relationships that kept him busy and fulfilled.

Just seven months ago he retired from the Navy, left his home in Memphis and moved to Alexandria where he worked in the military strength research arena as an independent contractor. He made regular treks to Shreveport, Louisiana to visit Sarah, Sam and the grandchildren, who he loved to have sitting on his lap to read to. These trips allowed a convenient stop off in Memphis to visit Chase. Maureen who was living in the DC area and he began weekly rituals of Tuesday night dinners, Sunday brunches, and grocery shopping at the military exchange together.

As the caboose in the family, Edward was eleven years older than me and was gone from home by the time a lot of my memories began. Despite this, over the years our families got together once or twice a year for visits. I loved walking with our kids to the Hollins Street Market in Baltimore to get penny candy. When we moved to Northern, Va in 1999 and settled in Leesburg, I was so happy we'd be able to get together frequently, and was mad when not long after he and Sue moved to Memphis. I liked getting his random phone calls to talk about not much, but just to catch up. Whether daily or infrequent, Edward Kearl played a meaningful part in all of our lives that will leave an irreplaceable void. Thank goodness for our memories and experiences of the good man that he was.