

Jack Miller – Apr 15, 1930 to Jan 30, 2011

I am not sure that my father-in-law Jack realized, when marrying Miriam, that he may be getting more than he bargained for. Along with Miriam, came a large family that included children and their spouses, grandchildren, siblings and their spouses, and even a mother-in-law. And in fairness, I should say that we in Miriam's family may have been a bit surprised by this new man in the family, who spoke with a bit of a strange accent, and whose style and manner seemed to come from a different time and place.

While joining into a large clan may have come as a bit of a shock to Jack, I can tell you that shock was quickly replaced with mutual respect, admiration and love, as we got to know Jack, and he us. A couple of weeks ago, Jack, in his characteristic fashion of trying to look after everything and everyone, asked that I say a few words at his funeral, on behalf of Miriam's family. Of course I agreed, and only hope that I can convey to all of you what an important and cherished place Jack came to hold in our lives and in our hearts.

Jack came from an era, and a place, where formalities were important, and chivalry was indeed a virtue. And Jack was chivalrous in the best sense of the word. He was kind, courteous, decent, and hard-working. He was a gentleman, and a gentle man, who believed in acting with honour and integrity, both professionally and in his personal life, and we have all learned this from him by example. One of our funny recollections about Jack and chivalry, and I am sure that is has been embellished through the years, is about a shopping excursion in Seattle with Miriam and Judy. Being ever the gentleman, Jack insisted on not only carrying all of the bags, but on opening all of the doors. Well as you all may know, when Miriam and her daughters get their groove going when shopping, there are a lot bags, and a lot of doors to open. But chivalrous and solicitous to the end of a long day of shopping, Jack opened all those doors while carrying all of those bags.

In talking about Jack amongst ourselves in the past few days, a common theme has emerged. All of us remarked at how Jack took a genuine interest in each of us, especially the grandchildren. When talking to any one of us, he was focussed on what was being said, was curious about the discussion, and with his keen and perceptive mind, would pursue the topic in different ways, both to show his genuine interest, and to satisfy his own desire to learn more about his grandchildren and about the world around him. A couple of weeks ago, David (Dwayne and Judy's son) was telling Jack about some of his current studies, including a course on wood carving with traditional native tools, and a seemingly unrelated course in philosophy. From his hospital bed, and despite the illness that he was battling, Jack was able to engage David and Dwayne in a discussion about how the two seemingly disparate and unrelated topics were actually connected.

When any of us would speak with Jack, he would always inquire, with genuine interest and concern, about every member of the family, and we knew that his interest and concern were real, and that he considered us all to be his children and grandchildren. He wanted to know all of the details, whether it was Elle's first words, or the latest book Makena was reading, or Jesse's latest pursuits in school.

We have all laughed, but with admiration, about Jack being our in-house dictionary and thesaurus. I don't think we ever found a word with which he was unfamiliar, or for which he could not suggest a few synonyms. And movies – Jack loved movies, and always seemed to be in the know about the latest great movies to see, and the ones to avoid. We would often seek his advice on books to read (we all know about his legendary personal library, and his voracious reading habits), authors to look up, book stores to check out, and libraries to visit.

Jack loved sports, both participating in them and watching them, and he took delight in being a spectator at his grandchildren's sporting events. This was a way for him to connect with, and relate to, their lives. My daughter Jenna remarked on this in a letter that she sent to Jack a couple of weeks ago. In part, she said*"I have been thinking about basketball games and all those who came to watch, Shabbat dinners and Pesach Seders, games of hide and seek with Perry and David in your apartment, brunches, time at the lake, and even a tri-generational trip to Israel. So many of my most treasured childhood memories include you... I know how lucky I am to have grown up with you as a regular part of my life, as one of the three grandparents who lived in the same city as I did, and who I always knew were my biggest basketball fans. And I know that part of who I am is because of the examples I saw in you and all the wonderful time I spent with you."* I believe that Jenna was expressing sentiments that are common to all of Jack's grandchildren.

And he knew how to motivate a young child to do something, or to solve a problem. At a dinner when Drew was maybe 6 or 7 years old, he got his leg stuck between the bars of a chair back. Jack, in examining the situation with his keen medical eye, issued the command: "Get the saw". Clearly Drew must have interpreted this to mean the surgical saw, because he somehow found a way to quickly liberate the stuck limb from the chair back, and the saw was never actually needed.

Jack was not above a bit of competitiveness, even with his grandchildren. As a youngster, Perry would play chess with Jack, who would inevitably win the match. However Perry discovered an advantage – the internet. Perry looked up some moves on the web, deployed them in the next match with Jack, and emerged victorious after only a few moves. In a show of respect, Jack closely studied the board for a long time, realizing that his young grandson was becoming a force to reckon with. He also started teaching himself about the wonders of the internet.

Golf also provides some great memories (or ones to forget) for all of us, including Jack. One summer, we were at Shuswap Lake to celebrate Roberta's 40th. Jack and Miriam of course came to celebrate with us. Drew, Jack and I went to play 18 holes, and in the course of the game, came to a hole with a dogleg right, and a water hazard along the right side. I teed up first, and for a change, managed to hit the fairway. Jack came next, took a mighty swing, and sent the ball 90 degrees directly into the water. In an uncharacteristic loss of composure, he hollered "I've gone in the bloody river." In his mulligan attempt, he over-compensated and went hard to the left. He stomped off the tee in disgust. 12 year old Drew teed up, sent one sailing down the middle of the fairway to within 20 yards of the green, and went on to make his first legitimate par. Realizing the significance of the moment for Drew, Jack quickly shook off his frustration, and joined with Drew in genuine enjoyment of the moment. Drew has often commented how he loves the fact that his grandfather was with him for his first par.

In the last weeks of his life, Jack made sure to tell all of us that he loved us, and treasured the place we had in his life. He especially stressed to us how much he loved Miriam, and how grateful he was to have spent the last 24 years of his life with her. Being a romantic, during the course of those 24 years he has often sent her a rose on Friday, and from his hospital bed, he arranged for her birthday present to be delivered. It is fitting that Jack's last lucid conversation was with Miriam on Thursday night, when he reminded her that he loved her, and the sound of Miriam's voice soothed and calmed Jack.

We were all fortunate to have known Jack, to be a part of his life, and to have lived lots of good life with him. Jack was a mensch, and he greatly enriched the lives of all of us, those who came to be part of his life and family.

(Written and delivered by Norman Hanson, Jack's son-in-law)