
MEMORANDUM

FROM HOWIE SNIDERMAN

DATE: June 25, 2012

RE: Eulogy for Norm Pollock (July 30, 1957 – June 21, 2012) Funeral - June 24, 2012
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Following Norm's ALS diagnosis, he and I spent a lot of time in "do you remember when" conversations. As we know, the cruelest part of ALS is that it's victims end up trapped in a body that won't work but with a mind that does.

As a result, our "do you remember when" conversations – which of course included his many friends and his family – would end up the way things almost always did in any conversation with Norm. They ended up as a contest to see who had the most accurate recall of facts, figures, information and trivia from a life well lived.

As you've heard from Norm's sister Carol, he was, shall we say, a "handful" growing up. The fact that he was smarter than virtually all of his teachers – and they knew it and so did he – made him a natural leader who attracted allies and friends who wanted him to succeed.

Norm and I met at age 16 at a BBYO District Board meeting in Wheeling, Illinois. He was an upstart born and bred in the North End of Winnipeg and I was another from the wild's of Southwest Calgary. For the next 38 years we planned, plotted, partnered and persevered together and created enough "Do you remember when" moments to last a dozen lifetimes.

In every way, and at every stage, I was in awe of him. And so was most everyone who knew him. His past 5 years bravely fighting ALS moved him from the “in awe” column over to the “hero” side.

Norm’s LSAT scores were off the chart. That was nice, according to him. The important part was that they were higher than his sister Ellen’s, who was a year ahead of him entering Law School at the University of Manitoba.

That may sound callous or boastful but it’s not the case. Well, mostly not the case, anyway. To understand this, you need to understand what growing up in the north end of Winnipeg instilled in him by way of life lessons. Carol has touched on that.

During the year that I spent at the University of Manitoba I was a guest observer of the phenomenon that is the Pollock Family of 522 Seven Oaks in Winnipeg.

The Pollock family were gracious hosts who opened their home and their hearts to me that year. I actually lived a few blocks away, but I took most of my meals by Harold & Arnice.

What I learned is that brilliance literally bounced off the walls inside the Pollock home. You pretty much needed a Ph.D. to keep up with the dinner conversation. I stuck to the food.

More to the point, and this is the point, Harold & Arnice Pollock taught each of their children that you must take nothing for granted and nothing at face value. Every blessing should be cherished and every stated fact should be challenged and reviewed until either proven true or false.

With that background, it was not a surprise that Norm soared to the top and graduated 2nd in his class from the University of Alberta Faculty of Law in 1980.

Norm's move to Edmonton was part of his plan to woo and wed Janet. I introduced them to one another. I've been vilified by each of them at times since, but that's really their problem, not mine.

Norm told me he would marry Janet Lerner after that first introduction in Calgary in August 1976. I asked him what it was about her that he found so attractive. He told me it was her personality. And, of course, the lure of the much older woman. Well, a year older anyway.

He patiently laid out his plans to get to know Janet better as we drove from Calgary to Winnipeg a couple of days later. During that drive I was able to see how Norm remained calm under fire. Literally. We were on the Trans Canada and I was driving. We were just outside Cairnsport, Saskatchewan. I started to slow down. Norm didn't stop reading his Baseball News. He just asked me why we were slowing down. I told him the car engine was on fire. He just said, "Okay, then, we should probably stop" and kept reading until I pulled over to the shoulder.

I saw that same focused concentration over and over throughout Norm's life. In court, on the baseball diamond, playing jeopardy (while skewering Alex Trebeck mercilessly for being such a smarmy pants), and while pursuing any goal that he deemed worthwhile.

After meeting Janet, Norm spent the next 2 years planning and biding his time before making the move to Edmonton in August 1978. Norm was about to enter his 2nd year of Law School and Janet was about to start her first teaching job after graduating with her Special Ed. Degree from the UofA. The wooing of Janet began in earnest.

Norm & I shared a 2 bedroom apartment in Garneau within walking distance of the Law School. Janet, being the sophisticated college graduate, had her own apartment across the river downtown. Norm had no car and Janet didn't even have a driver's license. And so, the wooing of Janet was by bus, back and forth across the High Level Bridge.

Norm's plan was proceeding well. He would present his ideas to me daily following our classes at Law School. We came back to our apartment and launched into our daily 90-minute study session ritual. The ritual consisted of watching afternoon reruns of Gilligan's Island, Bewitched & F Troop while playing table hockey on our kitchen table. We used Lemon Pledge to make the surface of the table hockey game slicker so that we could get the puck to slide faster. We took particular delight in trying to raise the puck off the table and aimed for one another's faces. Such children!

After our study session, Norm cooked us dinner and I cleaned up. We learned very quickly that was the best arrangement. Sharing the apartment was a lot of fun. It wasn't exactly an "Odd Couple" situation, but one of us lined up his socks in different drawers and divided them into brown, white, blue and black and the other didn't. Guess which one.

At the end of the school year the NHL playoffs were underway and our tv died. We had 2 weeks of exams to go and just enough money between the two of us to rent a tv so we could watch the playoffs or to buy groceries. Guess which one we chose.

Meantime, during the winter holiday break at the end of the first semester, the wooing of Janet got a boost. A fire in the apartment down the hall on her floor ruined her caused significant smoke & water damage to her place. Janet needed somewhere to live.

And so, Janet moved into Howie's apartment. Well, that's what we told everyone, anyway. After all, Janet & I had been close friends since we were 14 years old, so this made perfect sense to everyone, especially all of our parents. The fact that Norm happened to also live in Howie's apartment and that it was only a 2 bedroom apartment was, shall we say, a convenient fact.

My wife Debbie was then my girlfriend Debbie and she had also moved to Edmonton in the fall of 1978 from her home in the United States to complete her Special Ed degree at the UofA. The 4 of us spent virtually all of our time together for the next year and a half..... until Norm left me for another woman – Janet.

They were married in December 1979 at the Palliser Hotel in Calgary. Norm's grandfather Velvel brought me a voorsht from Omnitsky's Deli in Winnipeg. It was a wonderful wedding.

Norm graduated with his law degree in 1980 and then articulated and worked at the Stratton Lucas & Edwards law firm for 19 years, making many wonderful friends there amongst his partners and associates.

Norm rose quickly to become a brilliant litigator and that brilliance was recognized by the lawyers and staff that he worked with; the lawyers on the other side of the file; the judges he appeared before; the students he taught at the Law School; and the clients that he assisted with passion and who were devoted to him and followed his advice to the letter.

Norm was appointed Queen's Counsel at a relatively early stage in his legal career and never did Her Majesty have more able counsel on her side.

We faced one another across the canyon of opposite sides of litigation on 3 occasions. One time, he was cross-examining my client. My client took a long time to consider Norm's questions before he opened his mouth to answer them. So long, in fact, that Norm took to timing the gap. The longest was over 12 minutes. For 12 minutes we sat in silence across the Boardroom table from one another, while we waited for my client to actually answer the question. Norm and I spent most of those 12 minutes almost giggling at how ludicrous the situation was. **Almost** giggling, mind you. After all, we are trained professionals. We settled the case.

Soon after, I convinced Norm to join my law firm, Witten LLP. We had talked often during law school about working together. He joined us in February 2000. The managing partner of the firm at the time, David Margolus, put him in an office 2 floors away and across the opposite side of the building from me. He thought that way we might actually get some work done. He didn't have to go to such lengths and, anyway, it didn't work, as Norm & I were in one another's office many times each day.

Norm and I worked on many files together. We taught classes on Trial Advocacy at the Law School together for 17 years. We met for coffee at 7:30am before our classes started in order to trade ideas, but mostly just to talk.

The lawyers and staff at Witten LLP held Norm in the highest of regard. As his failing health started to reduce the time he was able to spend at the office, it didn't deter him from wanting to come in and whenever he did, a group would always form to visit.

Norm was fortunate to work with 2 wonderful assistants through most of his career, Christine Ludwig and Donna Letourneau. Both were totally devoted to him and he was ever grateful to them and appreciated that his successes were in large measure because of their help.

Throughout Norm's life, he loved sports. And he played to win. And if you were on his team, you better play to win, too. It didn't actually matter if you were a human being. Norm played Strat-O-Matic Baseball with as much passion and skill as he played the actual game.

Strat-O-Matic Baseball, or Strat, as we called it, is a board game where the outcome of each players at bat is determined by comparing the results of a roll of the dice with the possible outcomes printed on a card representing the statistical prowess of each player in the major leagues last season.

Norm routinely iced the cardboard players on his Strat team who were not performing by putting their cards in the freezer. Bottom line: there are consequences to poor performance! Play well, or you ride the pines (or sit in the freezer for awhile, as the case may be).

Norm didn't hesitate to let an umpire who made the wrong call know exactly how he blew the call. But he had a compassionate side as well. One umpire we had must have been at least 80 years old. After a series of missed calls followed immediately by a probing cross-examination of the ump by Norm, the ump admitted to us that he was making the call of "out or safe" based upon sound, as he couldn't actually see as far as the bases. Instead of continuing the inquiry, Norm just put his arm around the ump and gently suggested that he consider retiring from the umping game.

Norm loved golf. He loved everything about it. He particularly enjoyed organizing golf road trips. Our 50th Birthday present to one another was to organize a trip to play the Old Course at St. Andrews in Scotland. It was the ultimate road trip and included such highlights as daring one another to eat Haggis and an early morning trip to the Swilcan Bridge on the 18th hole to pose for photos while other golfers pounded balls all around us and yelled at us to get out of the way. But a photo is a photo and we were not to be deterred!

Norm & Janet bought their first home in La Perle in 1981 and organized a bar b q at their home for their extended group of friends. The July Birthday Bar B Q was a fixture on the annual social calendar and had all the normal markings of a Norm Pollock event. This included the unwavering menu. It wasn't until the early 90's that Norm relented and allowed salmon steaks to accompany the annual sacrifice of hot dogs and hamburgers on the holy Weber grill.

Norm & Janet spent hours and hours pouring over greeting cards and newspaper comic strips to find just the perfect 1 panel strip to grace the cover of the annual July Birthday Bar B Q invitation. My all time favourite was a scene of a fellow named Don on his knees fixing the kitchen sink while his wife watched. The caption: "Mary always enjoyed waking up to the crack of Don".

Norm's sense of humour ran the gamut. From the 3 Stooges and Blazing Saddles to Seinfeld, Monty Python and Fawlty Towers. He enjoyed laughing and used his quick wit to great effect. There is no one in his circle of friends and family who was spared, or who wanted to be spared. Norm was always in particularly strong form when it came to his very close friend Mark Huberman. Hubie wouldn't have had it any other way.

Norm helped thousands of clients during his 32 year legal career. He helped untold thousands more through his service to the broader community.

He devoted countless hours throughout his life to community service volunteer activities, nearly always as a leader by deed and by example. His service started during his high school years as a leader in BBYO and continued during his adult years as a member of the board for, amongst others, the Alzheimer Society of Alberta, the ALS Society of Alberta, the Talmud Torah Society, and, together with Janet, as founders of the first Fragile X parents support group in Edmonton.

A week ago yesterday, Lt. Governor Donald Ethell came to Norm & Janet's house to award Norm with the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal for Norm's outstanding contributions to Canadian society through his work on behalf of the ALS Society of Canada.

Norm was a proud Jew and a strong Zionist and supporter of Israel. He and Janet and their family have been members of Temple Beth Ora since they were married and I know how supportive he was of the congregation and of you, Rabbi Harari.

Norm was a fierce and loyal friend to so many. His circle of friends extended far and wide. People just wanted to be his friend. Norm had one rule – be honest. He himself was scrupulously honest and fair and he demanded it of those he worked and played with and from those he loved.

In June 1981, Mark Rozenberg and I started our articling year after graduating from Law School. At the end of that first week, we met Norm & our close friend Lyle Kanee for lunch and FLG was born – the Friday Lunch Group. The group members have changed from time to time, but each week for the past 31 years Norm met with the boys of FLG to tell tall tales and just enjoy one another's company.

From time to time the FLG boys bought stocks based on sure fire investment tips supplied by Marshall Hundert. These investments failed each and every time. Finally, Norm decided we should try a different strategy. We started to invest in companies that we didn't like, just to make sure they went bankrupt. We got so good at it that all we had to do was **think** about investing in Martha Stewart's empire, and the next thing we knew she was in jail. Yes, we were that good.

The past 5 years have been a journey that no family should have to go through, ever. Norm & Janet were sustained by their family and friends in every possible way. There was also a group of dedicated professionals who made every effort to help them ease the burdens that seemed to increase daily as ALS took its relentless toll.

On behalf of Norm & Janet I convey their heartfelt gratitude to Karen Caughey and Patricia Ordynuk of the ALS Society and to Norm's fellow board members on the ALS Society; to Dr. Janice Richman Eisenstadt, Dr. Sanjay Kalra, and to Leanne the Coordinator of Nursing and the other staff at the ALS Clinic; to Norm's personal physician and friend Dr. Ron Dlin; to Dr. Fernando of Veradero, Cuba; and to Norm's caregiver Dennis Froilan.

Norm also asked that I express his love and appreciation to the Huberman, Hundert, Rosenberg and Sniderman families and to the boys of FLG. He didn't have to – we know it.

Above all, Norm cherished his family. He was accepted with open arms by the Lerner family and enjoyed many hours visiting with Janet's parents, Gertie and Dennis. Discussions with Dennis most often turned into a debate about some arcane legal principle while his chats with Gertie were equally esoteric and might include a debate on the relative merits of installing a central vacuum system in the house vs. the upright canister system.

Janet's siblings, Lorne, Debbie, Judy & Eric became close friends and not merely brothers & sisters in law. As each of them, in turn, found their partner and had families, Norm was delighted to watch the family expand and the nieces and nephews grow up. I know that the Lerner and Kauffman families, spread out from Vancouver to Calgary to Dundas, Ont. enjoyed every chance to get together with Norm & Janet and Shawn & David and will keenly miss their brother-in-law and uncle Norm.

Norm's mother Arnice is an amazing woman. Her children nicknamed her "Radar" long ago, after Radar O'Reilly. She truly knows in advance what each of her children needs, even if they don't know it themselves. Losing a child is not in the natural order of things and I know that the hole in her heart will never mend.

Arnice knows how much Norm loved her and was nurtured by her in every way and there is nothing I can add that would supplement that knowledge. It is meager solace today for the loss she has suffered.

Norm's sister Carol was the go-to person for final peer review of the many ideas that came in from around the world these past 5 years as we all tried to find some miracle to reverse the ravages of ALS. Her expertise as a scientist was the final authority on each idea as far as Norm was concerned. You should know, Carol, how very much Norm appreciated that you and your children Alana, Ian & A.J. left no stone unturned on that quest for him.

A couple of years ago, the family debate was to determine which of the Pollocks was the most stubborn. Norm's sister Ellen won. She is rightly proud. To best Norm in anything is not an easy task. Ellen and her husband Stewart and their children Matthew & Leah have stood side by side with Norm and the rest of the family through this long, downhill ride. You were his life long foil, Ellen, and the best jeopardy partner he could have ever asked for.

I don't have a brother. As you can tell from these words, I considered Norm to be my brother.

But as close as our ties were, they never reached the level that Norm had with his younger brother Kenny. As you've heard, Norm & Kenny were partners in crime growing up. They were mirror opposites of one another in their personality and styles. They complemented and completed one another perfectly. They knew where all the buttons were for each other but rarely pushed them – they would never have willingly or knowingly hurt one another. That is the way it goes with best friends. Kenny and his wife Lori lived here in Edmonton with their children Kevin & Taryn for a few years, and Norm was in his glory knowing that Kenny & his family were so close at hand. I know how keenly your heart hurts today Kenny and I'm so very sad for you and for us all.

Norm loved music but he had a tin ear. Luckily, he knew it and so he mostly spared us from having to hear him sing. He and Janet passed down their love of music to David. And, lucky for you David, you got all of your musical talent from your mom. Norm was so proud of you, David, in every way. For the way you excelled at your summer job working for a prestigious downtown law firm; for the way you helped him & your mom care for Shawn; and for following your muse and graduating with your degree from MacEwan University this year.

He delighted in listening to you practice, David, and he cherished every chance to watch your recital performances and gig's. He was your greatest fan and you know that for the rest of your life, he is one of your groupies and will be looking down from heaven to listen to every note you play and helping to guide every step you take.

Shawn is a special blessing for Norm & Janet in every sense. He will miss his dad sorely, even though he may not fully understand where Norm has got to just now. Shawn taught Norm the patience and joy in the small blessings that life brings. The streak of justice that ran through Norm was honed sharper as he & Janet worked tirelessly to promote the rights of the disabled and ease the burden for families with children with Fragile X Syndrome.

I told you how Norm laid out a meticulous plan to woo and wed Janet Susan Lerner of Calgary, Alberta. I've outlined the success of that plan from inception through to wedding day. What I can't convey, however, is the depth of his devotion and love for Janet throughout their 32 years of marriage. The trials and tribulations they endured are almost biblical and as Janet mentioned to me a couple of days ago, "Why is this happening to me? I'm a nice person."

You were his rock and the most faithful, unselfish and loving caregiver Norm could have asked for during these past 5 years. While I know you will never accept how respected and admired you are by all of us, you should know that his greatest fears and frustrations were the toll that his illness was taking on you.

And so I think, Janet, that I'd like you remember, for just a moment today, the amazing things that you and Norm achieved together and the great heights of joy that you and Norm shared. And, most of all, I'd like you to remember for life that you are indeed a nice person. And Norm knew that, from the moment he met you and fell in love with you.

My friends, I've been writing this eulogy in my mind for the past 5 years. We all love you, Normy, and you have left a hole in each of our hearts that will never be filled. The one thing I know with absolute certainty, is that for the rest of our lives, the memories we have of you will be a blessing for us always.

On May 17 2007 Norm Pollock was diagnosed with ALS. Within a week I bought a couple of copies of the book "Caddie for Life" for us to read. The book chronicles the life-long friendship and partnership between professional golfer Tom Watson and his caddie Bruce Edwards. In particular, it chronicles the manner in which Bruce's life was ended by ALS.

Norm and I discussed the book and I asked him what he thought of it. He told me he liked the book a lot but, that he wasn't particularly happy about the way it ended.

Last Thursday Norm wrote the final chapter of his own book. I'm pretty sure he's not happy that it had to end. I know I'm not.

But what I do know is that Norm lived his life exactly the way he wanted.... by analyzing, scrutinizing, parsing, and considering things from every angle in order to make the best possible outcome from what was laid out before him. In summary, life gave Norm lemons and he made lemonade.

And that, my friends, is a life worth living and a life well lived.