

I suspect that many of you know that my dad “loved to tell a story”. It wasn’t always the same story, and he was often equally interested in hearing your story as he was in telling his, but he loved to tell a story. It often started with his smile and a hand extended to you. And if you offered your hand in return, you would feel his strong grasp that didn’t let go quickly and often pulled you in more closely.

If you were to hear a story from the biography of my father, it would explain a lot. And there is a written biography of my father, written by...my father, because how could a man that spent his life as a historian, leave it to others to get the story right. The facts were important. The stories are important if to none other than to him, my mother, me and brothers, children, grandchildren, and now great grandchildren. It’s a pretty good read, and as all stories are, better in some parts than others. It is a narrative that explains a lot about how Dad became the man we all knew, what and who shaped him, influenced him, and inspired him. It starts out like this.

Bill Rock was born to Mildred and David Rock, in a small town in South Central Pennsylvania. Nestled in a beautiful valley at the base of the Allegheny Mountains, Mercersburg in the early 1930’s had a population of 1600 people. Today the population of Mercersburg is....approximately 1600 people, but in 1930, Bill Rock was born in a modest two story brick house, built and purchased a few years before by his not yet married mother, Mildred Glee, not quite 30, on the earnings saved from her salary as a teacher. **Lesson #1 I from said biography, work hard, save for the future..**

The Rock household consisted of Dad’s mother, father, maternal grandparents, aunt, and her son. 7 people, 3 bedrooms, one bath, no heat upstairs. There was a big garden at the back of the house, and a hog and chicken pen, very commonplace in town. Everyone worked outside the home except grandmother Nannie who held things down on the homefront, eating the whites of Dad’s eggs, because he only liked the runny yellow part, listening to him practice the trombone on cold winter mornings before school in the tiny galley kitchen, (often the only warm place in the house), because she just loved

to hear him play. Dad had become fascinated with the trombone when he was 7. A man at church played one. Literally for months Dad walked around the house tooting a make believe trombone he fashioned from a toilet plunger, a medium sized nail for a mouthpiece, and the insert from a roll of toilet tissue serving as the slide. His parents decided the sacrifice of \$45 for a real trombone was a worthy one. Mildred, Dad's mother, enthusiastically taught school for over 50 years, except for a period of more than 10 years during the depression when she and her sister sewed for the shirt factory, when the teaching jobs were needed by men. Dave, Dad's father was up and out of the house before dawn, employed by a lumber business and later by a local car dealership as a mechanic.

When Dad was 8 or 9 years old, he and the Porter boys across the street had summer jobs picking strawberries for 2 cents a quart, but his first real job was part time at McLaughlin's Drug Store. He helped make ice cream, served customers occasionally at the soda counter, and cleaned up, all for \$8. a week. Soon a better offer came along at Myers and Tritle Department store for \$12. A week. This was before child labor laws and he worked 55-60 hours a week in the summer and 12 hours on Saturday during the school year. When he was 15 he moved on again, this time to the A&P where he continued to work until he went away to Gettysburg College. **(Lesson #1, an important one, reinforced, work hard, save for the future.)**

Saturdays were for family and generally visits to aunts' and uncles' farms. Dad loved to recount tales of time spent with immediate and extended family, playing games, listening to the radio, fishing, baling hay, butchering hogs, milking cows, churning ice cream, picking apples and cherries, and canning fruit. On rare occasions the family might make a trip to Gettysburg, Atlantic City, or West Virginia. In 1939 they traveled to New York City for the World's Fair and that was an early step in Dad's discovery that there was a very big world out there beyond Franklin County Pennsylvania. **Lesson # 2 from said**

**biography; be intentional in making time for family. No investment of your time and energy will yield greater rewards throughout your life.**

Sundays were for church. There was never any question that young Bill would be accompanying his parents to St. John's Lutheran Church. My grandmother sang in the choir and played the piano for Sunday School opening and closing for more than 50 years and so it was that Dad was introduced in his early years to a variety of ways in which he could serve and participate in church activities, singing in the choir and playing the trombone in a small Sunday School orchestra being among his favorites. **Lesson #3, Dad writes in his remanences, that starting in those early years and continuing throughout his lifetime, he "found the church to be the single most important place to encounter the greatest percentage of people trying to live according to the standards and values that he came to believe made life worth living."**

No story about my Dad and Mercersburg would be complete without mention of his very close relationship with his mother. If you would ask him about her, he would say she was an angel. He kept a picture of her on his dresser and another on his desk with the caption she wrote, "I surely love life". Her life was an ongoing inspiration to him. She shared her natural curiosity of the world around her and her love for learning. Her encouragement and calm words of guidance were his anchor. She taught him, and later, he in turn taught us, to seek the good side of all people and situations, to live positively even in times of difficulty. **Lessons # 4 and #5, God put us here on earth for a purpose and if something needs to be done, get busy, BE ON TIME, and do it! Modesty and humility are some of the greatest human virtues. If you have to tell people who you are, than you probably think a little too highly of yourself.**

Dad continued to stay in touch with Mercersburg until his death. At least twice, sometimes three times a year as my brothers and I were growing up, he and Mom would pack up the station wagon with us kids for the drive home. The things that he loved about Mercersburg, we came to love. I will always

associate Mercersburg with visits to Aunt's and Uncle's farms, family outings to State Parks, ox roasts, birch beer sodas, warm juicy August peaches, quarts and quarts of cherries picked off the tree out back, creamy full fat ice cream made from the local dairies, church, incredible snow storms, and the most fantastic sledding you could ever imagine. Dad subscribed to the Mercersburg journal newspaper, attended class reunions, (there were 17 in his graduating class) and received letters from his mother, written twice a week on Wednesday and Friday like clockwork. In return he wrote to her on Tuesday and Thursday. I was the beneficiary of that learned discipline, for when I went away to college, missing family so desperately at first, Dad wrote to me twice a week, likely never knowing what a lifeline that was some weeks.

The recounting of these facts and stories was important to Dad. The community of Mercersburg, the people, and the experiences they provided shaped my father. The patrons of the grocery store, the neighbor kids, the class mates and teachers at school, the aunts and uncles and cousins, the ministers, Sunday school teachers, and members of St. John's church, and most importantly Dad's parents, Dave and Mildred Rock were Dad's "village". They cheered for him when he was Rumpelstiltskin in the school play, despite the fact that the entire production had to be postponed a week when he came down with a case of the chicken pox. They proudly applauded when he played Kiss in the Dark at a community band concert. They encouraged him to be a leader at school and in his community. They congratulated him when he graduated from catechism, high school, undergraduate school, and finally graduate school. They critiqued him too, and corrected and guided him when needed....They prayed for him. They taught him life's important lessons, often by example, which he in turn, alongside my mother, taught me and my brothers, I don't doubt his students at BGSU, and perhaps even you. All the support that came from that little community in South Central Pennsylvania that he loved so well, gave him courage, strength, and fortitude to approach life with confidence, determination, perseverance, and joy.

Dad made it explicitly clear in his final weeks, the theme of this service was to be joy. How I wish we could sing some hymns together today. Dad would surely have loved that. And although CoVid protocols dictate otherwise, I believe Dad's enthusiastic booming voice can still be clearly heard, if only in our memories. Let our hearts be glad today, full of joy, knowing that Bill Rock lived life to the fullest. He had no regrets and leaves behind ....a biography, lest any of us get a little sketchy on the facts, but more importantly, a legacy of love and joy for me, my family, for the congregation of St. Marks, and for all those whose lives he touched.