

**TRIBUTE TO
WILLIAM RANDALL MCLEAN
MAY 1, 1999
by Derwyn Crozier-Smith**

Thank you all for joining with us to pay tribute to Dad and to say farewell. There are lots of stories to tell about this guy and we want to share a few of them with you to give a flavour of the man we love.

Although born in Milestone, Dad was living in Regina as a young boy. After the death of his father when Dad was only five years old and the subsequent breakup of the family, Dad essentially survived by looking out for himself. He dropped out of school very early but he often boasted about having been strapped by M.J. Coldwell, principal of Thompson School and later leader of the CCF party. He spoke of his respect for that man but he wasn't particularly influenced by Coldwell's political persuasion as I found out frequently in our political debates. Dad worked at many casual jobs and lived with many families on the east side of Regina. He bragged about the fun he and his companions had leading city police on merry chases with their boyish pranks.

He landed a job at Sears where, it seems., the general manager took him under his wing. One of his early jobs was chauffeuring the GM or his wife. Dad spent 44 years at Sears, mostly as a driver on home delivery routes on the west side of the city. Although he was offered inside supervisory responsibilities he preferred to be out on the trucks and Sears could not have asked for better public relations. He's told us some great tales from his Sears career but here's one of our favourites:

One female customer phoned in an order to Sears for some ladies' bathing suits and ordered the garment in several sizes. When questioned about this by the telephone sales operator, the customer said she would try them on while the driver waited and send back what didn't fit. The operator pointed out that this was against company policy but the customer reassured her that her driver was Randy and it would be OK. What the customer didn't know was that the telephone operator was Randy's wife and Dad got a lecture at home about more than company policy from the "war department" as he occasionally and affectionately called her. Dad also had a conversation with the customer about her discretion and the story later made its way to the Reader's digest.

Dad interrupted his career at Sears to serve with the Royal Canadian Navy when the volunteer reserves were activated in the second world war, one of many prairie boys to do so. Dad kept a lot back about the tougher side of those years on destroyer escorts but we know his memories were vivid of the ship running into a cliff in the fog off Newfoundland when radar malfunctioned and of his bunkmate, with whom he'd been playing crib earlier in the evening, who was killed in the accident.

But we have had jolly times hearing the stories of his inventiveness as a ship's victualer - that's the person responsible for provisioning the ship with food and drink and overseeing the distribution of those supplies. Mutton was a common part of the provisions and it pained Dad to see so much of it thrown overboard when the men wouldn't eat it. So, quite contrary to naval regulations, Dad would set out down the streets of Halifax, Esquimalt or Prince Rupert to see where he could make a deal to trade quantities of mutton for smaller portions of chicken or something else the men would eat. Incidentally, we've never been able to entice Dad to eat even the most succulent baby lamb chop. For him, "mutton is mutton".

Another great war story has to do with Dad's shipboard responsibilities of serving the daily tot of rum. Apparently the rule was that the men lined up and were issued their ration and had to toss it back in full view of the commanding officer, the "Old Man" to Dad, to ensure that none was stashed away to be consumed in larger quantities. Dad, ever the common man's advocate, was able to persuade several COs to let the men take their rum with coke and to sit down and enjoy it. But somehow, father was able to stretch the rum provisions and usually had a private stock of his own stashed away. Officers would know that for some special occasions they could see Bill McLean and we think this saved his hide on several occasions when he was called up on the carpet for some misdemeanor or the other. He recounts one day when there was a surprise inspection of his refrigerators by the "Old Man" and Dad didn't have time to relocate the bottle he had in there. The CO, upon seeing it, said, "McLean, tell me I didn't see a bottle of rum in your refrigerator." "No sir, you did not" responded Dad. "And McLean, tell me that if I came back and looked again in 5 minutes I still wouldn't see a bottle of rum in your refrigerator". "That's correct, sir" and it was the last that was ever said of it.

Meanwhile, he had a girl back home in Regina and he eventually sent her an engagement ring in the mail and, when he was able to get a leave, he gave her nine days notice of the wedding date and they were married here at St. Peter's in 1943. Mom spent much of the rest of the war years chasing him from coast to coast to be wherever his home port was.

Not many of you know of Dad's other association with this church. Mum tried to make a respectable man out of him and he was baptized here in 1954 and confirmed here two weeks later. Mom and Dad were active in the Couples Club, a church social group. When a new Anglican parish was contemplated in north Regina, the Bishop asked father to leave St. Peter's and go as the rector's warden and founding member of the new parish. He was very active there until the closure of that church and, we are told, in his usual direct way, father told the Bishop just what he thought of the decision to close the church.

Above all, the family and neighbors know Dad as a collector; maybe even a scrounger would be a better word. "You never know when you might need something like that" was his philosophy as he filled a basement, then built a garage and filled it too with old tools, worn out appliances and parts, screws, nuts, bolts and fasteners of all sorts, bicycle parts and many things I don't recognize. The neat thing was that when someone did need "something like that" he had it, and

more surprisingly, knew where to find it.

For many years I've been encouraging him to have garage sales or throw things out - even volunteering to have a Lorass Disposal bin moved into the back yard. (Note I said I've been encouraging because unfortunately his daughter has inherited this 'collect-and-save' gene.) But he would just give a silly smirk and say, "Why should I do that? When I'm gone you get to do it" Well thanks a lot Dad!

His handy man skills were quite remarkable. He was never interested in reading directions, never took a course, everything was just common sense to him from building an addition on to the house, wiring, plumbing, appliance repair or what have you. He taught me anything I know about these things and stuff I shouldn't know. Wiring was a good example. I decided to put a bedroom in the basement in Aberdeen and had actually taken a four hour class on home wiring from the community college. But Dad took over and preferred to leave the power on while he did the work. "How do you know if you're getting it right if the power's off? Just keep your wits about you and don't touch both ends of the live wire at the same time!"

When he converted his house's heating system to natural gas he installed the piping and duct work himself and had a company come out and inspect what he had done. The contractor was amazed at the job and offered Dad a position with the company saying he had seen no better workmanship among his trained employees.

I confess now that even when I could have tackled some jobs myself it was much easier to stand out of the way and play dumb than to argue with unorthodox approaches and just to see the satisfaction he got from it.

Just one more memory - Dad the card shark. He'd have his own crib hand counted, and yours too, almost before you could lay the cards down. He could see fifteens more ways and faster than anyone I know and the thrill of skunking an opponent was written all over his face. "15-2 and the rest won't do, 15-4 and the rest don't score".

We hope you will share your memories and stories with us and each other. Many of our best memories will be the sheer delight and pride he had from his grandson and 'Pal', Darryl, and Darryl's wife, Celine, and the hours of pleasure he has had in the past two years from loving his great-grandson, Andrew William, or 'Little Pal' as he called him. On our way back from Minot earlier this week Judy and I stopped at Dad's father's grave in Milestone where he was buried in 1920. The inscription on his grave marker reads "Though lost to sight, to memory dear". That's how it will be for us.