

## MEMORIAL SPEECH FOR ALAN MIRABELLI

*Michel Mirabelli*

Good afternoon. I want to thank you all for coming today on behalf of my family and Alan's sister, Marilyn. I know many of you have travelled a distance to be here today, and we greatly appreciate your efforts. Throughout my father's treatment, he was always continually amazed by the outpouring of offers for help to an appointment, meals and the true caring and love that so many showed him to the very end in his local community and beyond. My family thanks you for your kindness and we would all be so lucky to be so well cared for and thought of to our very end.

I want to start off today by letting you know that my father was very much involved in all of today's events, as he was a bit of a planner and an organizer - as many of you can attest to.

His goal was for today to be about a celebration; it was not to be a dark day in his eyes nor in mine. He saw this celebration of his life being about bringing together the people that meant so much to him in life - friends, family, colleagues and his students. So in that vein, I want to urge you all to join us in the hall after the service for some food, drink and memories in his honour. He will definitely be watching and taking notes, or perhaps mental pictures, this time to be stored in a cloud.

To begin a discussion of my father's life before I knew him and the 40 years that we spent together might be best described as "complicated." I say this as there were many facets to who he was, and to the end, he was always a student of life and never stopped learning. I was speaking with one of my father's long-time colleagues, Bob Glossop, a few weeks back, and I said it's a little ridiculous if you think about it: most of us in life are lucky if we are really good at *one thing* and it may take us forever to find it. In my dad's case, there are four that come to mind right away. There are not too many people in the world that I know who could decide to build themselves some stunning Shaker furniture from scratch, then remodel their home to put it in, take an interesting picture of it and, lastly, write you a well-versed speech in two official languages telling you all about it in an interesting way. *He* could, though.

**His goal was for today to be about a celebration; it was not to be a dark day in his eyes nor in mine.**

Like I said, the talent was a little ridiculous, but maybe one of his greatest gifts was his willingness to share his talent and knowledge with others, from his days teaching communications at university to teaching younger generations the finer points of woodworking. Right up to the end, he never stopped teaching photography, working with all ages and loving watching the progression of their work. Many of you are here today, and to hear him speak of you was like the minor league baseball coach talking about his prospects. He would say, "She has an eye for this" or "She is going to be a great one. She has so much talent..." Know that he took great pride in your work.

I spoke earlier about my father's life being complicated, and that started from very early on in his life being born to a Jewish mother and a Catholic father in Egypt in the 1950s. This might have offered some societal challenges, but the real life-changing event in his

## REMEMBERING ALAN MIRABELLI

life came one day at the age of eight. Soldiers appeared at the door and told them as foreigners they were being given 10 days to leave the country, and that all of their assets were being kept behind. At any age this would be awful, and I think for much of the first half of his life, he tried to chase away some of the demons of that day, finally coming to terms with them and turning a corner later in his life.

Our family settled in Montreal thanks to my grandfather working for Sun Life and the company wanting to help such a valuable and well-respected employee in any way they could. My father looked up to my grandfather in many ways and one of them was the respect that colleagues had for him and their wanting to learn from him. It was this respect he ultimately cultivated in Ottawa while working at the Vanier institute of the Family and eventually helping to head it. In his day, if there was a breaking story related to changing family dynamics, or a new census report being released, he would often be found on the local and national news to break down what this new information might mean for Canadian families.

He also worked with large corporations in Canada to offer a perspective on what the needs of families were at that time and what might be coming that they needed to be prepared for. I can personally say I loved that his work also allowed him to travel the world, as I can remember great toys being brought back from places such as Berlin, Australia and Malta, where our family is from.

**He started playing with cameras at a young age and could never really give up the bug throughout his life.**

His natural ability to speak publicly and in two official languages easily even had him called on to do things that weren't exactly what he was used to. I can recall him telling me a story – and I mean *story*, because it seemed that he was trying to put one over on me at the time. One sunny July first weekend when he happened to be at home, he got a call. He tells me: the French-language arm of the CBC, apparently they have an issue. They're without a French-language commentator for their national broadcast on the events being shown from Parliament Hill. So they asked him to do them a favour and head on down as soon as possible, and they were putting him on the air about topics he knew *nothing* about. I definitely had to shake my head at this one, as it's a little ridiculous the talent that he could bring even at the last minute. This would be like you or I getting the call at a Senators' game to come out of the stands and do play-by-play – but in our second language. Who does that?! It stills make me laugh to think about it.

As talented as he was at so many things, I think if you asked him and those around him what he was best at, it would likely be photography. He started playing with cameras at a young age and could never really give up the bug throughout his life. In preparing for today, I found portraits dating back to the 70s that clearly indicate the talent he had and may have tried to suppress for the sake of career, family and the expectations of others.

Over the last 20 years, I am happy to say that he came to terms with the idea that photography was his passion, and what he was meant to be doing with his life. Starting with an extended break out west many years ago, he explored the rainforests of British

# REMEMBERING ALAN MIRABELLI

Columbia, the rugged terrain of the Northwest Territories, the beauty of the Prairies and the varied landscapes of our own Ottawa Valley. He managed to capture beauty that leapt off the page, first on film and then in digital forms. He explored his range to the last weeks of his life, showing the true passion he had for the art form. I have to wonder whether, with the talent he had in so many forms, if he had started his photographic work earlier, he would have been in art galleries across Canada. Knowing him, he would have found a way and found an audience. He left us too soon with more work to be done, but we are the better for being able to view his creativity and life's passion.

## **I will fondly remember the time spent with the mix of sawdust in the air in shops in Montreal and Appleton...**

---

I had the good fortune to take a week away from university and visit him in Victoria as he started his work in earnest. It was the road trip that I will always remember. We took a drive up to Long Beach and Tofino from Sunny Victoria (minus the sun) in January. We enjoyed the varied landscapes and finally settled into amazing beachfront accommodations, watching winter storms roll in and cooking meals together. I could see how happy he was and I loved the time together with him and seeing him so relaxed and thankful.

The things we remember from childhood often centre on the smell and sight of various things. I will fondly remember the time spent with the mix of sawdust in the air in shops in Montreal and Appleton... and, of course, freshly brewed coffee to go with it all. I was his original barista, after all.

I, as well as his grandchildren, my wife, his sister and all of our extended family will greatly miss his smile, his generosity and his natural curiosity.

We will continue to enjoy his legacy in those he has taught and rejoice as we send him on his way to the Lord. Thank you.