

The Real Steve Cichon:



A Tribute to My Relationship with My Ol'Man

Steven P. Cichon

1951-2010



The Real Steve Cichon

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For My Ol'Man

The Real Steve Cichon

Preface

Losing a parent is unimaginable, even when you spend the decade up until the death imagining it over and over again.

My dad was a very sick man the last 8 years or so of his life. He lost a leg to diabetes, and had a very serious heart condition. He made regular trips to the hospital by ambulance, and spent weeks at a time in the hospital.

During those times when he was very sick, I tried to prepare myself for his death. Tried to think it through; imagine what it might be like, so it would all be easier to deal with.

No dice. You'll read that it's all unimaginable. An extension of yourself is gone. There's a hole in your heart. All sorts of vital information is gone. It's like somebody lit the reference book you've used your whole life on fire. You'll read, too, about quite a few things I'd do *just for dad*, that I sadly have stopped doing.

He's been gone about two months as I write this preface, and it's still hard. I have no doubt that it always will be. But putting all the swirling emotions I've felt into writing this has been wonderful.

Don't get the wrong impression: I'm no Mitch Albom, and this is a story that's likely not to make sense to you at times, as it hops scotches around to different parts of my life and my dad's life.

It's the story of my dad's last week on this planet, and the story of his life on this planet, and, mostly, the 32 years his spend on this planet as my Dad, and Dad to Greg and Lynne.

I'm honored that you're reading this, and hope you learn something about what a great father my dad was (and in echoes, still is), and that maybe you grab someone you love and literally or figuratively hold 'em a little tighter. Or at least enjoy the pictures.

Steve Cichon; June 5, 2010

A Tribute to My Relationship with My Ol'Man

I'm writing quite a bit of this on a cruise of the Southern Caribbean; a cruise that was booked only about 5 weeks before this moment I sit here typing. Monica and I love cruising, and love to share our love with our family. My mother investigated the possibility of having her and my dad join us on the vacation; but to book so quickly was impossible, given the need for a handicapped room for dad.



Mom & Dad relaxing with "Drinks of the Day" on the Carnival Liberty, 2007

But that wasn't the deal breaker. Dad himself put the kibosh on the possibility. "Only a few weeks away?" he asked, incredulously. "I want to be able to look forward to it. I want to be able to think about it and dream about it. That's the best part."

Anyway, the whole conversation about him not wanting to go on that particular cruise came as we were at Mom and Dad's house to pick Dad up, and take him to visit my grandfather at Grandpa's new nursing home.

Dad almost didn't get to go. I had called him the night before, and told him about the research I had been doing into the family tree, and that I was going to drive up to see Grandpa to share some of the stuff I found with him. My grandfather is blind, which so I had been making a careful study of the photo a Cichon cousin had sent me of my great grandparents-- grandpa's mom and dad-- taken on

The Real Steve Cichon

their wedding day in 1913. I told my father that I had put together some information on the Cichon family tree that had never been connected before.



My Great Grandparents on their wedding day,
1913

Not surprisingly, not only was my dad *not* interested; but he was also hostile. "I don't give a damn about those people," he told me.

Though my dad grew up living right across the street from his grandparents, neither my dad nor his family really felt welcome in his Babcia and JaJa's Fulton Street home. His grandfather was very sick with cancer when dad was little. The cancer, and his drinking, made my dad's grandpa

a very nasty man in his little kid's eyes. Dad always said his only memories of his grandfather were of him spitting at him, sitting on the porch drinking, and throwing the empty glass liquor bottles at my dad and his brothers and sisters.

I told my dad the only way he could go was if he was nice, and would listen to stories about his grandparents without any nasty comments.

"Pa was really a good guy before he got sick," Gramps told dad, almost apologetically, almost crying. My dad always said that the only time he ever saw gramps cry growing up, was when Great Grandpa Cichon died.

A Tribute to My Relationship with My Ol'Man



Dad, 1957

That Saturday afternoon was the only time my dad had ever talked with his father about Great Grandpa. Listening to my grandfather talk about his dad, he sounds a lot like the loving, doting-at-times kind of guy that both Gramps and Dad have always been. It's a direct genetic link for which I'm very thankful.

It was the first time my dad opened his mind to listen about his grandfather from *his dad's* point of view. Just like my father was one of ten kids, Gramps was one of about 10 as well. But that was during the Depression.

Money was tight, but gramps told us that day about how his dad bought him and his brother a donut from one of the colorful street vendors who used to wander through the streets of *the Valley* pushing their carts or riding their horses. It was a one-time special treat, that my grandfather still remembers almost 80 years later.

After the gramps and his brother were chomping away, the baker told great-grandpa, "12 cents." That was two days worth of drinking money, and my gramps was told to enjoy that donut, because it was the last one he was ever going to get.

My dad loved that story. He also loved the story of Gramps trying to "lift" a bundle of rags off a ragman's donkey. "Those were different times," Gramps explained.

"Bullshit," was the look dad and I gave one another, smiling.

The Real Steve Cichon

Talking of the old neighborhood brought back memories for my dad as well, and the stories began to flow for both of them. My dad and grandpa, both virtual shut-ins, talked to one another on the phone 4 or 5 times a day, but it was about the news, or current events. Not the old days. This was special for them.

Gramps told about his time working in the General Mills grain elevators. My dad talked about the Buffalo River, and how it was more a glowing sludge than water as it passed under the South Park Avenue lift bridge when he was a kid. And the huge piles of sulfur outside Republic Steel just on the other side of the lift bridge. And when we kids would sometimes join dad to pick up Gramps from his job at Buffalo Color, the ol'Alaline, right on Lee Street, a block away from the bridge.

I let dad and gramps tell their stories, and I tried to keep quiet and just take it in. Grandpa talked about his father working hard, lifting barrels of chemicals onto railroad cars 10 hours a day for 40 years. My dad reminding gramps that he often worked 4 or 5 jobs to keep food on the table and the lights on.



Dad, Me, Gramps 2008

A Tribute to My Relationship with My Ol'Man

My dad truly idolized his father; the way I think Gramps idolized his dad. These stories were just reminding exactly how much like his dad my dad was. I was thinking of the stories of dad and me. I don't think Dad ever really realized how much like his father he was.

My ol'man worked 4 or 5 jobs, too. At one point, he was a Contract Specialist for the Army, meaning he helped write up the contracts to buy missile systems and things like that. He was also working nights as a security guard at a car dealer that sold Mercedes, Jaguar, and Rolls Royce. Overnights he cleaned pizzerias, and on weekends, he had a long paper route.



Dad in the kitchen reading the paper, late 90s

I remember one rainy Sunday delivering papers as a family from the back of our 1983 Dodge station wagon with faux wood paneling. It was the last time dad delivered papers, as I'm sure there were at least a dozen calls about errant or wet

papers. After trying earnestly to deliver them in the dark, driving rain, we just gave up and started chucking them. Those people missed their Sunday paper one week, but it's a family memory I'll cherish forever, a fun family bonding time.

The Real Steve Cichon

I also remember getting up early on the weekend to go clean the pizza joints with my dad. I'd vacuum the front, while he cleaned in the kitchen. Before that, my dad owned a bar for a while, and sometimes, again on weekend mornings, we'd go in with him. Since we were little kids, under the age of 5, my dad never called it the bar, or the gin mill to us; to us, he called it "the business."

On our way up from our Allegany Street house, up Folger, to South Park, we'd sing a song he made up one day, probably waiting for the South Park lift bridge. "We're gonna have a good time, *WE'RE GONNA HAVE A GOOD TIME*, we're gonna have a good time, *at the business*. DIN-DIDA-DIN-DIDADINDINDIN."



Dad and his kids, in the dining room on Allegany Street

A Tribute to My Relationship with My Ol'Man

Sometimes on the way home, we'd take Abby Street, which my dad assured my brother and me was special because only boys were allowed on it. *The Boys Only Street*. We loved that we wouldn't take that way when my mother or sister were in the car.

At the bar, we'd play shuffle bowling, PacMan and Asteroids, shoot pool, and listen to the *Van Halen* version of *Happy Trails* on the jukebox. We'd pour ourselves unlimited *Squirt* from behind the bar, but we had to *ask* for the little bags of chips or the occasional glass bottle of *Visniak* pop. I liked to play with the endless paper towel roll in the men's' room, and sometimes Al was at the bar when we'd get there. He had his own key. He'd send us to the cooler to get him bottles of Genny Light, which we'd sometimes make a mess of opening.



Dad telling a story, 2008. I'm glad he was always oblivious to me taking cell phone photos of him; because I did it a lot.

But those were *my* stories; that day, I was glad that gramps and dad were having such a good time spending a little time in the past. I'm also glad that my last quality time with my dad was also quality time

The Real Steve Cichon

for my dad and his father, sitting in that stark new room in an Orchard Park nursing home. We talked about everything under the sun for over an hour, and then it was time to go. Dad and Gramps kissed each other's hand, like they always did. Sadly, it was the last time.

My dad's mood varied greatly. He was in constant pain from diabetic neuropathy all over his body. It was because of that neuropathy that he didn't feel stepping on a nail, which ultimately resulted in the amputation of his leg. His body's inability to regulate itself meant he was often cranky or tired or hurting, and a good mood could go sour quickly.

But there was none of that on the way home from seeing Gramps that beautiful Saturday. Since this was the first time at the new nursing home, I parked in a bad spot, and it was quite a long uphill push to get dad, in his wheelchair, back to the car. We were chatting, and remembering a similar long push through the streets of Jamaica, when I made a wrong turn when we were in port there during our cruise. Quite abruptly, he changed the topic..

"Hey, don't forget to get me that shoe."

Dad didn't like to ask for favors, so liked to comply when he did. And I was mad that I forgot to bring over a slip-on shoe for him, to replace the one his new puppy *Ringo* chewed up. When I got home, I dug through the closet and put the shoes in the car so I wouldn't forget next time. I grabbed both shoes, even though he only needed one. What the hell was I going to do with one shoe?

That whole ride back to mom and dad's house was great. Dad was in a great mood, and just cranking out stories and laughing. He really loved to talk, and when he was in a good mood, and really talking, I almost hated to interrupt him.

On that ride that day, Monica and I heard about dad's big Lenten fish fry dinner. It was the best fish he ever had at the *Gardenvue* the night before. There was no middle ground for Dad on food.

A Tribute to My Relationship with My Ol'Man

Either it was "the best he'd ever had," or it was "just terrible." Seriously, a meal was never just "ok."

He was also "going to get walking soon."

This is one trait I inherited from the ol'man, no doubt about it.



Standing at the top of unfinished stairs with a gut, early 90s

Things weighed heavily on his mind, and he constantly struggled with big sweeping things that needed to get done. For a long time, it was "getting this house done."

Our family moved into a new-build house that was only about 75% finished. 22 years later, it's holding steady at about 87%.

Another popular one was, "Starting Monday. This stomach is gone." But for the last several years, the thing weighing most on dad's mind was the energy to get up and start the long road to being able to walk. He started a

couple of times, but then he'd wind up in the hospital for a few weeks, and be back at square one.

In the car that Saturday, he also talked about smoking. My dad smoked cigarettes from the time he was a young kid up until the late 80s when he switched to a pipe. He picked up cigarettes again for a few years in the mid 90s, and then just quit completely. But he told me on many occasions, he thought about smoking all the time. He loved it. He said he'd smoke a cigarette "this big" right now, if he could.

The Real Steve Cichon

On this particular day, with a big grin, he told us that he had told my mother that he was thinking about starting to smoke again. "Man, she squawked."

My mother thought that he was always trying to aggravate her,

but I don't think so. Sometimes, obviously, yes. But like this smoking thing: he was probably thinking about how good a cigarette would taste, and told my mother. I don't think his intention was to aggravate her at all. But that's not to say he didn't enjoy it when he found out that he pressed the right button.



Time driving dad around in the car was always quality time. He didn't get out much, and we were usually going off to do something fun and interesting when I was driving him somewhere. I was happy to drive the ol'man around because, just like most kids, I owed him for driving me around.

Now I liked to ride my bike most places before I could drive, but one place I couldn't: My internship at WBEN, 20 miles away. I put in 60 hours a week as an intern that summer, and dad was there dropping me off by 7 and picking me up at 7. I can see him now whipping into the driveway at 2077 Elmwood Avenue in his "Caddy." This, of course, was a 1989 Cadillac Cimarron, which was nothing more than a Chevy Cavalier with a red-leather interior and a luggage rack on the trunk. But he loved it.

A Tribute to My Relationship with My Ol'Man



It was his love of driving that forced me, despite my better judgment, to help him cheat on his driving test. His eyes were bad. Really bad. We lived right down the street from an Auto

Bureau location, and, at some point in the mid 90s, he asked me to walk in and write down the eye chart. I did. He got his license, which they continued to renew right up until he died.

Two days after our visit to see Gramps, and that great ride home, Mom texted. "Dad is in the hospital VA high blood sugar."

It's sad to say, but this news wasn't all that earth-shattering. This happened quite often with Dad. He always had trouble controlling his blood sugar. The biggest problem was, of course, that he didn't much care about controlling his blood sugar.

From way back, he knew all the tricks. Eat this, take this much insulin. Skip a meal, eat this, take this shot. But he never really was a details oriented guy, and would often fail at his own plans. When I was small, maybe 5 or so, I remember my dad crashed into a toll booth with my little brother and me in the car. I remember playing with chalk right on the road of the Thruway waiting for the cops to show up; and then telling the state troopers that my dad was a

The Real Steve Cichon

diabetic when they were asking me questions... I'm sure assuming he was drunk.

Diabetes had cost him a leg. He stepped on a nail, and having no feeling in his foot, he didn't know until it was gangrenous. He was in the hospital for months as doctors removed his heel and fought infection to keep the rest of his leg.

After months of rehab, when he got home, he fell and shattered the leg, compound fracture style. He was in the hospital another six months as they removed the leg, and that healed.

But my dad, the proud, tough Marine, *still* a tough proud 18 year old in his own mind, was physically a much weaker man as a result.

When in a serious frame of mind, he'd always downplay his vanity. He would never admit to it, but he was a vein guy. It made the hospital gowns and physical deformities brought on by diabetes even more difficult for him, no doubt. He probably wasn't anymore vein than anyone else, but he denied being concerned at all about his appearance.



1969. Tough looking Marine Dad.

A Tribute to My Relationship with My Ol'Man



Whenever he was getting dressed up for something, brushing his hair or tying a tie in front of a mirror, he used to croon another of his favorite songs. "I'm just soooo good lookin'....." Just like with food, either he didn't care at all, or he'd sing about it. He'd always tease my mom that he was waiting for the money to come in, so he could get his new convertible and go pick up some honeys.

After losing his leg, he'd never have the strength to walk regularly again. And in this weaker state, his blood sugar became increasingly difficult to regulate, and he wound up in a "bus" to the VA often. Very often.



Dad spent his birthday in the VA, 2007

The Real Steve Cichon



That last trip to the hospital, my mom feared it was something with his heart, and she was right. His sense of taste was off; he said the hot dogs they were having for dinner tasted awful. Mom said they were fine. After the usual arguing between the two of them, he finally agreed to go the hospital. His final of many rides to the Veterans Administration Hospital courtesy Orchard Park Fire and Rescue. That was

Monday.

The next day, after work, I met my sister Lynne in the hospital parking lot, and we went up to see the ol'man. The doctors pulled us aside in the hall, and talked to us in hushed tones. Maybe they were trying to tell us that he was dying, but all I remember from the conversation is thinking that living is going to be tougher for him. We have to clear out his bedroom for better access to his bed. We have to get the wheelchair ramp fixed. He had a major heart attack, and they weren't sure what the next step was going to be.

They had to take Dad down to get some tests done, so we went with him as they wheeled his gurney down the hall. He was joking with us; joking with the nurses; giving everyone a quasi-fake hard time. It was just enough to let everyone know that he was OK, but thought being in the hospital and having tests done- well, as he would have said- sucked.

We followed him back to his room, where, in a moment of weakness, he told Lynne and me that, "Mom was right," and that he should have gone into the hospital earlier. He knew he has hit hard

A Tribute to My Relationship with My Ol'Man

this time, but he seemed normal. Good, actually. A little tired, but shouldn't he be? He'd just had a major heart attack.



Get outta here!

He kicked us out, and I ignored him. We continued to talk for a little bit. I got him some ice water-- he was always thirsty, especially in the hospital, then he kicked us out again. "All right Dad, in a little bit." Lynne looked at me like I was crazy. A few minutes later, he said "All right... **GOOD BYE!!**"

And that was the cue for us to take off.

One of the great gifts I received from my dad was learning to visit people in the hospital.

When I was 16 or 17, I stopped to see him in the hospital on my way to work. He was sleeping so I left him a note. He told me the next day, "Always wake someone up in the hospital. People have all the time in the world to sleep in this place."

He never had to tell me that again. I woke him up dozens, maybe hundreds of times after that day. I usually tried to bring him a newspaper or some kind of "car magazine," as he called AutoTrader, or any of the weekly classified newspapers selling used cars.

The Real Steve Cichon

He was always on the quest for a new car.... Even though he hadn't driven in almost a decade because of his leg. "I'll be driving soon," he always said.

So I'd bring him a "car book," and some pop. And just like he liked cheap beer and cheap whisky (even when someone else was buying), he liked cheap pop. I'd have to make a special trip to Tops for their generic diet cola. "Diet Spin is the best," Dad would say, "Even better than Coke. I'll have that Diet Spin any time. Really. Save your money. Get that Diet Spin."



Drinking an Old Milwaukee,
1985 above;
Diet Spin 2007 below



In the hospital or otherwise, he was also leery of talking with us too long. He always thought we had something more important to do, than talk with him. At my parents house, when we'd come to visit, more often than not he'd eventually wheel himself down to his office and play on the computer. He'd leave with a big announcement like, "OK, I have some stuff to do on the computer."

A Tribute to My Relationship with My Ol'Man

Hunh? The only thing he ever did on the computer was look at autotrader.com for "his next car, once he gets walking."

He'd say, "There's a nice convertible Saab... a '99... Before they changed the front on it... Only 7-grand. It's in Ohio." He loved the hunt for cars as much as driving, and when my wife first decided last year that it was time to get a new car (for a number of different reasons), Dad eagerly climbed into the passenger seat as we thought about various makes and models, and weighed several bargains.

Dad's car obsession continued til the day he died, even though he hadn't driven in almost a decade. It was his great love. While as a young single guy, he had muscle cars (Like an AMC Javelin) and sporty convertibles (Like an MG), and he always took great pleasure in the hunt for new cars.

He enjoyed it even when he was buying wonderful (?) family vehicles like our 1981 chocolate brown AMC Spirit with light brown pin striping, or our 1983 Dodge Aries faux wood-paneled station wagon.



The Real Steve Cichon

Over my lifetime, I spent many weekend days driving from lot-to-lot with my dad... the newspaper filled with red circles around cars that could be the next Cichon Ride. We'd always go after hours as to avoid the salesmen. And you'll still find Autotrader magazines with big, heavy red circles all over the Cichon house.



Getting ready to look at the cars.

I learned a lot from my dad about shopping for cars, not all of it good. First thing to check: Check to see if the door was left unlocked. Bonus *checking out the seat time* if yes....

If not, squinting and moving your head around the driver's side window. "Can you see the mileage, Steve-o?"

There were other things to look for, too. "See, son? New tires on this one." That was always a big selling point with the old man, who seemingly never stopped shopping for a new car. My wife would laugh if she knew that during our most recent car shopping experience in particular, she was actually shopping with my dad via me. Life is much easier once you admit to yourself that, in some ways, it is inevitable to become your parent.

A Tribute to My Relationship with My Ol'Man

After visiting my folks one Friday night, we took a ride to a nearby Honda dealership (after it was closed, of course) to scout things out. We found a good car at a good price, and one of the Civics was unlocked. Really comfortable and roomy.

We went the next day to figure out the details, and with the rebates, and generous amount given for our trade in, it was a much greater bargain than either of us could have imagined, and we were both excited about being able to pick up the next car on that Tuesday (dealership was closed Labor Day Monday).

I was excited, in part, because the dealership was close to the folks' house, and we could take a spin by to show the ol'man the new car. Seriously, no one on the planet gets more excited about anyone's new car than Steven P. Cichon.

So, I was a little disappointed that day when my mom texted me to say that he went to the hospital that day. He was OK, but was in ICU to get his sugar evened out; it was messed up by a viral infection he'd been fighting for a few days.



He was his normal self, though still in the ICU when I went up to visit him an hour or so after picking up the car. Happy to have company, and talkative, which certainly was not always the case.

Dad in Boot Camp, 1969. He always treated doctors and nurses at the VA as if they were his superior officers.

The Real Steve Cichon

After the usual pleasantries, and getting the update on how he's feeling, I dropped the bomb.

"So dad, we picked up our new car today." He knew we were looking, but had no idea we were close to buying one. Either were we, frankly, until we got the great deal on the Civic. It's an over-used cliché, but there's no other way to describe it. The twinkle in his eyes was like a kid at Christmas.

His body stiffened, and after opening his eyes wide in anticipation for a moment or two, he sat back in the standard issue vinyl hospital room chair, his head tilted back, dozens of wires coming off of him, closed his eyes with a smile on his face, very seriously said, "OK, tell me about it *slowly*."



Tell me about it... *SLOWLY*.

I'm not one for the gadgets and features, but I always study up, because I know my dad will want to know. He loved that we got a great deal. He loved that the highway mileage approached 40 MPG. "That's almost like driving for free," he said. He loved that the dash lights were blue, the same color as one of the big puffy bandage things to keep his IVs in place.

He stopped me on one feature that bowled him over. "Telescopic steering?!? In a CIVIC?!? They only put that in the top of the line Mercedes, for heaven's sake!" My dad swears a lot, but he does try to control it. Of the 20 or so cars dad's owned, only "The Cadillac" had telescopic steering. "I'd adjust it every time I got in, he said,

A Tribute to My Relationship with My Ol'Man

making a holding the wheel motion and moving it all over the place. That's what a telescopic steering wheel allows you to do. Monica really likes this feature a lot, too.

And, Dad was almost disappointed when I somehow didn't figure out how to park the car outside the window of his hospital room so he could look out at it. His eyes were so bad, he wouldn't have been able to see it anyway. We chatted for a bit, and he kicked me out. "Go home," he told me, and I did.



my First Communion, 1985

The VA Hospital, "the best damn hospital in the world," was really dad's home away from home. The thing about him being in there was he was a captive audience.

I know he didn't want me to leave, but he thought there were places I'd rather be. I hope he knew that there was no place I ever wanted to be more. Though we never talked about it, I know he knew that. My rule... I waited for three "get outs" from the ol'man before I actually left. Any less, and it might have looked like I

The Real Steve Cichon

wanted to book out. Any more, and I was being disrespectful of his "wishes," at least as he verbalized them.

So I had been kicked out his hospital room about as many times as I had wakened him up to visit.



Lynne, Dad, Greg, Buckshot 1987

someone there with her made it easier.

After kicking me out the last time, that day when I was visiting with my sister, we agreed dad looked good, and we'd go visit him again the next day. Lynne doesn't like hospitals, but I know wanted to

visit dad as often as possible. Having

I never had a chance to get afraid of hospitals. My dad used us as living, breathing greeting cards in hospitals. Rules be damned, he'd sneak my brother and me into all sorts of places we shouldn't have been. I have two memories of my dad's Grandpa Scurr, my great-grandfather. A man for whom I know my dad had a tremendous love.



Aunt Agnes, Grandpa and Grandma Scurr

My first memory is of being afraid to climb the stairs up to his apartment on the corner of Seneca St and Fairview Pl, and him

A Tribute to My Relationship with My Ol'Man

standing at the top of the stairs laughing. A loving laugh, amused by me, the little runt. A laugh like I remember my dad's mother, my Grandma, having.

My only other memory of my Great-Grandpa Scurr, who died when I was two-and-a-half years old, is visiting him in Mercy Hospital. He had a breathing tube in his nose, and though it was scary, I remember the joy on his sick face, holding my hand that day as he lay there dying of cancer. My dad instilled that in us; swallow your own feelings to help others.



Dad & Grandpa Wargo

The other time I remember my dad sneaking us into the hospital was a few years later to visit another great-grandfather; my mom's Grandpa Wargo. He was at the VA, and in those days, there were smoking lounges for the

patients on each ward. My dad secreted us into one of these smoking lounges, and left us with a very elderly black man, who was excited to see kids, and excited to get one over on the nurses and doctors. "If anyone comes in," he gleefully motioned that he'd hide us in his bathrobe. Grandpa Wargo was elated-- not only to see us kids-- but also by the subterfuge with which my dad had brought us to him.

So, Dad was looking well when Lynne and I left him that Tuesday. It was a shock, then, when I spoke to my mother the next morning. Doctors called. The heart attack was very serious. He was down to 30 percent of heart function. His heart disease had progressed very quickly from the previous heart attack, and the amount of damage

The Real Steve Cichon

meant surgery wasn't an option. His blood pressure and heart rate were still erratic. "Most people don't survive this kind of event," the doctor said. An hour or two before I was planning on getting back up to the hospital, a text message from my mother: "Dad going on a respirator."



My dad always had a very healthy view of the hospital; specifically the VA Hospital. He thought it was the greatest hospital on the earth, but hated being there. He knew he'd get better there, so he could "get the hell out." He didn't like a lot of "bullshit." Normally, I'd guess that he'd think a respirator was "bullshit." I was shocked that he himself signed off on allowing them to put one in. He must have felt something wasn't right.

The hope was being on the respirator would allow his blood pressure to regulate. They also put a balloon in his aorta to help his heart pump. I was talking with him; joking around with "regular dad" only 24 hours before, but now I was walking into the room of a very sick man. There was a nurse assigned to him around the clock, monitoring that heart pump.

A Tribute to My Relationship with My Ol'Man

Eight intravenous lines were pumping stuff into him. A feeding tube in his nose, the respirator, too. By all accounts, he should have been completely out of it; but he was trying to tell me something, tell us something. Lynne, Monica and I were there. You could see it in his eyes, through the drugged haze; he had something important to say. His hands were strapped down to the bed, but he was raising them up as much as he could. Lynne and I each grabbed one of his horribly swollen hands. It was the only comfort we could try to provide.



When we were little, the words "Grab my hand" uttered by the ol'man were, in retrospect, more a sign of danger than anything else. He wanted to know where we were. Crossing the street. Walking through a busy place. Once when we were very small, my dad took Greg and me to a Bisons game when they were still playing at Buffalo's War Memorial Stadium, "The Old Rockpile." The East Side

neighborhood where they played had seen much better days. I don't remember where Dad's free parking spot was, but it likely meant a walk through the tough *Fruit Belt* neighborhood.

"Grab my hand" that day had him almost lifting us up as he walked fast, almost carrying us by the wrists through that neighborhood on our way to see Buster Bison and some AA baseball. I remember the walk; I remember the hats we got that day; I remember Buster taking my hat, and taunting me by holding it just out of my reach. Rightly so, mascots don't taunt kids anymore.

The Real Steve Cichon

We were holding his hands in that room at the VA ICU, but really had no idea what he wanted, or what he was trying to say.

I'd say, "I know, dad," trying to comfort him, but it wasn't really of comfort to either one of us. Lynne and I each grabbed a hand, because he was moving them around, and we thought that's maybe what he wanted. He ran out of energy trying to tell us what it was he was trying to tell us through the drugs, and the inability to talk with the respirator tube going down his throat.

I remembered the previous time he was on a respirator. A few years earlier, the whole family was in the ICU room just around the corner where he was this last time. Everyone was upset seeing him on this machine, pumping his chest up and down, essentially breathing for him. It was only a few months earlier than that when Grandma Coyle died after a few really rough weeks on a respirator. The entire time we were sitting there, Dad was trying to say something; which, again, was difficult for him to do with the tube and the drugs. His eyes were bugging out of his head, and there were two syllables he was trying to mouth over and over again. After an hour or two, one of us finally realized, he was trying to tell us, "GO HOME." We told him we'd leave; he was relieved, and drifted into sleep.

Remembering this, I asked Dad this time if he wanted us to go, if that's what he was trying to tell us. This time it was a violent no. We stayed until he fell asleep. The doctors told us that they were going to try to take Dad off the heavy sedation drugs early the next morning, around 6:30, to see if his vitals would stabilize.

Stopping on my way into work, I was there the next morning as he came off the sedation drugs, and I immediately realized what he was asking for when he was holding his hands up for Lynne and me - He was trying to scratch himself, or at least ask us to scratch him. He was having an allergic reaction to one of the meds he was on, and I spent the next hour before I went into work gently scratching his swollen body, and talking with him. He couldn't talk with the tube still down his throat, but he could communicate much more easily.

A Tribute to My Relationship with My Ol'Man

With one look he threw my way that morning, I was instantly able to know exactly what wanted.

One of the ICU nurses was assigned to watch Dad's aortic pump, so he was sitting in Dad's room as everyone stopped by to say good bye and good luck. He was retiring after a few decades at the VA. This nurse had been caring for the ol'man for years on his trips to Intensive Care. If he was able to talk at that point, Dad would have told him congratulations, earnestly thanked him from the bottom of his heart for all his years of service, and shaken his hand.

"Sir," I said, "My dad can't talk right now, but I know he wants to add his congratulations, and thank you for taking care of him all these years; and he'd want to shake your hand; so I'll do that on his behalf." Dad added an acknowledging nod. And just like dad would have, I thanked him another half-dozen times before I left.

Taking him off the drugs, they must have almost immediately got the answers they wanted about his condition, because they started pumping up the drugs again before I left. As I was gently scratching his horribly red and swollen skin, he began to drift back off into a drug induced haze. I told him I loved him, and his eyes told me all I needed to know in return. He began to struggle to say something... Somehow, violently, he managed to get out the word "TELL" enough for me to understand it.



"Dad," I said, "I'll tell Mom, and, Greg, and Lynne, and Monica, and Grandpa, and everyone that you love them." I hope I didn't cry, and I don't think I did. He calmed down

The Real Steve Cichon

and slipped back into that heavy sleep.

If you didn't know, my dad had been through plenty of intense medical trauma. Relapsing fever that almost killed him in the Marine Corps, heart attacks, surgeries, blood sugar scares, infections.

Now I'm fairly certain that moment, that day, was the first time in his entire life; through all he'd been through, that he thought he was going to die. And I wasn't sure he was wrong. I don't think I cried in front of him, but I know I did on the ride into work. During that ride, I sent everyone this text:

I was just with dad for about an hour... dr says hes doing better today. bp is up... He was pretty much awake, and then they increased sedation meds. hes very itchy, and they are working on it. he wanted me to tell everyone he loves ya...

I never told anyone that I saw my dad saying good bye to me that morning. I mean really saying goodbye. I will later, I thought. But if he pulls through this, none of us will have time to worry about him worrying about dying. We have to get the house ready. We have to be strong for him when he wakes up. I pushed the thought completely out of my conscience mind out of bare necessity. I'm really only thinking about it again, for the first time since that morning, right now as I write this narrative.

After work, I stopped into see Dad, expecting the worst. But to my surprise, when I walked in, the respirator was gone. He had pulled out the tube by himself. "Sometimes people know before we do that they're ready," said one nurse. In stride, I took it as a good sign. Had to. He was still itchy.

He spent another day or so under heavy sedation, but he was in and out. Friday, Monica, Lynne, and I walked into him physically battling the nurses. He was agitated, itchy, and was trying to walk away. He wasn't even aware, I don't think, that he only had one leg. He was calling me "Chuck," his older brother's name, and was telling me to

A Tribute to My Relationship with My Ol'Man

get him the hell out of there.

Usually I tried to take the soft touch approach with the ol'man, but since he thought I was Chuck, I decided to tell him to lay the hell down and listen to the doctors, Chuck-style. They got him calmed down, and he went to sleep. Monica and Lynne were shaken and scared, but I tried to keep an even keel.



Uncle Chuck & Dad 1955. Outside the apartment they lived in behind City Hall.

The next afternoon, things seemed to be improving.

Remember, earlier that week, he was on 8 IVs, including 2 heavy-duty pain killers, hanging under lock and key. By that Saturday, he was on one IV, insulin.

The Real Steve Cichon

"This old bastard was going to do it again," I thought. The old war horse is pulling through. His vitals were getting better. We all admired the urine in the bag at the bottom of the bed. It was full and yellow, a great sign that his kidneys were OK. He's going to take a big hit this time, he'll be tired and slower, but he's going to make it. I sent everyone this text message as we left.

3/27 1:30pm

Just spent a couple of hours with dad... hes doing much better. kidneys & blood pressure are normal... and hes off the ventilator (still needs oxygen tho) hes still sedated... very agitated when awake because his back hurts/itches. hes off all meds, cept insulin.

Right now, I want to thank Monica, my wife. She hates hospitals. A few traumatic experiences as a kid still creep her out. But after having spent a few hours Saturday morning and afternoon with my dad, she made plans for us to go back again that night. Being there that night was a wonderful gift.

To our surprise, when we walked in, the ol'man was a little tired, but seemed no worse for the wear. He asked me for some water, which was a common request. It was more a perturbed demand than a request. He was thirsty, and pissed about it. That's the way it was in the hospital, though.

The diabetes always made him very thirsty, and his throat was raw from having the respirator tube down it. That also made his voice a little gruff, but still pleasant. It was really just a normal visit with Dad.

"And how are you, sweetheart," he asked Monica as per normal.

"How's everyone at home?" he'd always ask of Monica, too. He meant, of course, her parents and the rest of her family. When we were visiting him at home, he'd usually ask you if you wanted something to drink as well- *How 'bout a cup of tea?* Monica always

A Tribute to My Relationship with My Ol'Man

threatened to one day say she would like a cup of tea, and my dad wouldn't know what to do.

I got dad the drink this time though, filled up a Dixie cup with water a few times, and helped him scratch his slightly less red, swollen, and bloated... but still itchy skin.

I sent this text message.

3/27 7:19pm

Dad's awake and talking. doing good. still itchy from the allergy to an antibiotic.

He was doing OK for a while, but with some strange stuff mixing in. He didn't have his glasses on, and I know he couldn't see a damn thing. Period. But at one point he asked, "Who was that smiling little boy who just walked by?"

There was no little boy, and even if he was smiling, Dad couldn't have been able to have seen it. Weird, but ok. I got him some more water, and he started to drift off to sleep, or so it seemed at first.

My mom texted back, and said he was in a foul mood when she visited earlier; but that's not what we saw. I texted:

7:33pm

He's been nice since we've been here. he was alert and joking. groggy and tired now.

He was lying in bed, with an enormous smile on his face, made even more dramatic by the fact that his upper dentures weren't in. It was a big, beautiful, toothless grin. Monica and I smiled at one another enjoying my dad obviously having good thoughts.

The Real Steve Cichon



His left leg was severed just below the knee, which gave him a 6 or 8 inch stump. That little stump was kicking up and down under the sheet like it was keeping a gentle beat. And the smile continued. Our hearts were warmed watching this.

His eyes were closed like he was sleeping, so we were startled when he spoke out in a voice just as clear as he was using with us only a few minutes earlier.

"Oh, Three children," he said, like he was answering the question of someone sitting right next to him. The big toothless smile continued, the little stump going up and down.

Soon thereafter, he was picking his arms up in the air. I asked him what he was doing.

"I'm moving this wood," he said. A few minutes later, he looked at me, and asked for some more water. To see if he was really in his right mind, I said I forgot his new dog's name.

"Ringo," he remembered instantaneously. "That little punk, he's a beautiful dog, but he doesn't shut up."

That was certainly Dad, talking about the dog they'd only had for a few weeks. His mind was there, no doubt. His face scrunched up and looked angry for the first time that night. I asked him what was up, and he said he was "saving the dog from that man." But then, a minute later, he was smiling again, laying there with both arms in the air, one hand over the other, each on cupped as if he was holding a long, cylindrical object.

A Tribute to My Relationship with My Ol'Man



"What are you doing, dad?"

"I need a beer," he said with a smile, going through the motions of drinking the biggest beer any of us had ever seen.

He was clearly phasing in and out, seemingly effortlessly shifting between total lucidity and total hallucination. I didn't know what to make of it, but he certainly seemed to be doing well, *feeling well*, and having a good time. He was talking to us, and seemed to be on the right path. The doctors were all saying this, too. That he was improving well. I texted.

8:10pm

we've been here for a while now... hes awake for a few minutes, hallucinating for a few minutes... hes still coming off those heavy drugs

We were getting ready to go home, but I really didn't want to leave his side. It was a strange feeling that I can honestly say I'd never felt before. Had I been there at the hospital that night by myself, or at least in my own car, I probably would have called Monica to say that I was going to spend the night.

In all the dozens and hundreds of hospital visits I made to see my dad, I know I never felt that way before. That was the first time I

The Real Steve Cichon

really felt desire to sit next to my dad all night; but I demurred to what I had assumed Monica's objections.

So, a couple more scratches for dad, another big drink of water, and one more adjustment of his bed. His back was bothering him, so I had been moving it up and down for him throughout the few hours we'd been sitting with him.

"OK, we're leaving dad," I said. "Do you want your bed up or down?"

"Put it down, so I can die," he said, very matter of factly. Monica and I both heard it, but ignored it; chalking it up to any number of really inappropriate things he could and would say at any given time.

So I put the bed down, squeezed his hand, pushed back the hair on his head, told him I love him, good night, and we'd see him tomorrow.

Despite the way I've painted the picture so far, with hindsight leading up to the inevitable, we all thought that dad was improving. Getting better, dodging the bullet again, and that his odds of pulling through this event "that most people don't live through" seemed more and more likely with each passing day of better health. Just like a dozen times before.

It just wasn't meant to be.

What happened next in the narrative is difficult to explain, and I won't try to explain it; I'll just write what happened.

At 3:45am, only a few hours after leaving Dad's VA ICU bedside, I shot straight up in my own bed at home from a stone cold sleep.

Somehow, I had the knowledge that my father was dead. It's as if it actually struck me. It was a blast of light, and a power surge. There was no physical sensation, but the instantaneous impregnation of

A Tribute to My Relationship with My Ol'Man

this complete knowledge into my mind provided enough of a jolt to completely wake me out of a sound sleep. The knowledge wasn't fuzzy, it was perfectly clear. But I don't think at that moment it was something I could synthesize into words.

There wasn't a feeling of dread or sadness, either; at the exact moment just knowledge and a peaceful serenity. There was no more suffering. At that moment, I wasn't upset at all. It was only a moment, but it felt as if I had spent hours and days reflecting on this circumstance, and was at peace with it.

That was just that moment, though. I became more concerned as I sat there thinking about it, as this realization hit me. I was struggling to look for any reason why this would come into my head.

I'm usually very good at remembering dreams, especially when I'm just waking up from one, but this wasn't a dream or a nightmare.

Again, somehow, some way, by some force, I just had this knowledge. Looking at the clock, seeing that it was 3:45; I laid there pondering all this as I fell back asleep.

When the phone rang at 4:11am, it wasn't the ringing, but Monica telling me to get up which brought me to. Mom said she'd just got off the phone with the hospital, and they told her that they'd been working on dad for about 20 minutes after his heart stopped working. I threw on some pants, and took less than 10 minutes to get to the VA.

I knew Dad was dead. I knew that I was going to the hospital to say goodbye to his already bereft-of- life body.

We took the stairs to the second floor, and walked over to the ICU, past the nurses' station, to the bay where Dad was. The lights were low, and the curtain was pinned closed.

I pulled back the curtain, to see my dad's face swathed in the bluish light of the small wall lamp behind the bed. His eyes were closed;

The Real Steve Cichon

his hair was lovingly pushed back on his head. The tubes were gone from his nose, and the IV pick in his neck was gone. In fact, all medical machinery and apparatus were missing from the room. It was just dad and that blue light.

He really looked beautiful, like he was having as restful a sleep as he had had in years. Instantly, I was thankful to the nurses who groomed my father's lifeless body, after spending nearly a half hour trying to bring him back to life. My father was right all these years; the VA is the best damn hospital in the world. What love and caring for a man who truly and fully appreciated everything they had ever done for him.

After some amount of time, Monica asked if he was OK. I said no. I grabbed his hand, just like I had only hours earlier, and pushed his hair back on his head.

His doctors and nurse came in to explain they'd done all they could, and to offer condolences. We continued to sit. Monica asked a nurse what time my dad went into cardiac arrest. She said 3:45. The same time I woke up. They were never able to bring him back.



I still expect Dad to be in the living room, either watching TV or taking a nap. With Casey, 2002.

I had bolted awake the moment my father died. I don't know how, I don't know why. But I know whatever the reason; however it happened, it has helped me through this awful time. I will spend the rest of my life

A Tribute to My Relationship with My Ol'Man

being thankful, and trying to understand it.

After spending some time with dad, I waited out in the hallway, not wanting anyone to walk into the room alone, driving all that way not knowing whether they'd see dad or dad's mortal remains.

My Uncle Chuck arrived first, then my mother and sister, then my brother. It was Palm Sunday. Dad was gone.

My mom asked me to call the funeral home and get things ready. I knew they'd ask for photos— They always ask for photos-- and we'd have to pick out an outfit to wear. By now, reading this, you must know that I loved my dad, but let's all admit together-- he was a slob.



Fathers' Day 2009: Lovin' that Jim Beam (don't tell your Mother!), but sweaty and in need of a hair brush. Poor Dad.

A slob in part because he had a very difficult time taking care of himself towards the end of his life, but also in part because he didn't like anyone telling him how he should look, dress, or groom himself. That included his mother, his wife, his kids, the Marine Corps, or the nuns at St Stephen's Parochial School, from which he was thrown out.

I started going through photos, and couldn't find one that I'd have said, "make him up like this." The pics from the cruise we went on

The Real Steve Cichon



Mom and Dad on our cruise's "elegant night."

came close, though. Man, did the ol'man have a great time on that "float." He ate like a king, drank in moderation, and saw some of the world he'd never seen before. He was healthy for a week, because he was eating properly, and getting good sleep.

Since that was really the last nice outfit he dressed himself in, I grabbed his formal night attire, dug through his glasses drawer- he had at least 25 pairs from the VA-- and grabbed a pair that weren't too bent, and just told then to push his hair straight back, and leave the top button of his shirt undone. Can't let a guy who never combed his hair or buttoned that top button if he didn't have to-- Go to the great beyond that way.

He looked "respectable" as he "checked out," but still him, with a brown check blazer, a green shirt, and his favorite shoe; and his hair not-too-perfectly tussled back. I think he'd be proud of the way we did him up.

A Tribute to My Relationship with My Ol'Man



I wonder if someone got Dad's Marine Corps tattoo in a skin graft. The Ol'man would probably tell me to shut up and stop being a lemon for asking a question like that.

He'd also be proud and excited; actually, that some of his "spare parts" could be put to good use.

He often lamented that science wouldn't want nor need his broken body someday. We were all elated to hear from UNITYS that they could use his skin, corneas, and connective tissue to help people in need of transplants. I only wish

that he could have known of that possibility ahead of time.

"That's great," he would have said reflectively, nodding his head, "Wow, that's really great." His little stub would have been kicking up and down and he would have had a big smile on his face. He would have done anything to give his ailing sister a kidney, but by the time he got back from his overseas station with the Marine Corps, it was too late. Knowing the pain of losing someone who needed a transplant, he'd have felt tremendous satisfaction with his anatomical gift. We all feel it for him.

While my father's death created a hole in my heart that will never be filled, the warmth and kindness of friends and even just acquaintances helped create a new chamber of my heart, or at least swelled one that I didn't know was there.

Contrary to the circumstance, Dad's wake was a wonderful and enlightening experience. Though I felt tremendous grief with the ol'man's death, the kindness of people rushed in to fill the void in ways I could have never previously imagined.

The Real Steve Cichon

Reconnecting with my dad's family was wonderful. They all knew



STEVEN P. CICHON

Senior Portrait, 1969.

that he'd do just about anything for anyone of them; and he often did. I heard stories about my dad being the toughest kid on Fulton Street, or the toughest kid at South Park High School. My dad used to say that he didn't get in a lot of fights, but he won the ones he was in. He was talking about beating up kids from the ward (what anyone from "The Valley" calls "The Old First Ward."). But I think one could extrapolate it to his life in general, as

well. What he took on, he kept going until he won.

And I choke back tears right now, thinking about the dozens of friends who send notes or cards, or e-mail or facebook messages, or stopped by the funeral home. I was carried through the death of my father on the shoulders of friends.

I don't like to ask of others for myself. It's not just that I don't like to; I don't do it. So when people offer of themselves without being asked, I'm really touched. That played out over and over again during that time, and I'm forever grateful and indebted to one and all:

Really good friends, who are always there. Really good friends who I haven't seen in years. And, perhaps the most powerful to me, the friends who reside under the category "acquaintances," who came to offer a shoulder for 30 seconds, or to write a note, or to say a prayer.

A Tribute to My Relationship with My Ol'Man

I will spend the rest of my life paying forward the generous compassion, camaraderie, and love shown to me in the few days following Dad's death, and I won't even come close to giving what I have received. The people in my life are amazing.

It was all a very busy time for me; figuring out readings, who would do them, pall bearers, music, making funeral breakfast arrangements, visiting with family and friends. Funerals are for the living, but I wanted this done in a manner that my dad wouldn't have been saying, "ah GEEEZ" at.

The one detail weighing most heavily on my mind was a eulogy. Dad was a very spiritual man and a God fearing man of great faith. But he wasn't a church goer. He considered himself Catholic, and loved when Chaplain Priests would visit him at the VA, and would readily accept Communion. He taught CCD to 7th graders for a while when I was in elementary school, and later he'd join his Aunt Elaine in teaching handicapped kids religion at St. John Vianney. But he had little use for mass, or many of the trappings of the Catholic Church.

I really didn't want to have the typical "well meaning priest doesn't know this guy" funeral mass; although after meeting him, I'm sure my dad would have liked Msgr. Gallagher. I told him about my dad, and told him basically what you've just read. With all this in mind, I was determined to write and deliver the eulogy my dad deserved.

At the actual mass, I'm left with the impression that Msgr. Gallagher said a beautiful service, but I couldn't say for sure. I spent most of the time praying that I would be able to get through it. Strong. No tears, no breakdowns, just the words on the paper.

The three pages, written over three days are tear-stained. There are some very deep and wonderful feelings shared in those pages, and I was determined to share them without becoming a blubbering idiot. I read into a microphone every day, and present things that make me sad, angry, elated, or miserable in such a way that the listener has no idea.

The Real Steve Cichon

I tried to dial that in, prayed for guidance, and asked dad for help.

There's little doubt what he would have said.



With a tinge of *preturbedness*, he'd have said bluntly, "Just do it. That's all. If you're going to do, it."

So I did. For him, and with the strength he gave me to do it.

Here's what I said about my dad at his funeral:

First, let's acknowledge the white elephant in the room... My ol'man was a pain in the neck, and in places lower not appropriate for a church setting.

He was loud, impatient, gruff, and he swore a lot.

Now if that's the only side of my dad you knew, let me introduce you to the rest.

His heart was of like a child-like purity. And it was big. The only ulterior motive he ever had... EVER... was to aggravate my mother... (which he was pretty good at.)

A Tribute to My Relationship with My Ol'Man

Like not even two weeks ago... when he told her that he wanted to start smoking again. Now he probably meant that... or at least the thought had crossed his mind. He didn't mention it just to get her mad, but once he hit a button, he loved it.. And the needling that ensued was just to get her going. He gleefully shared that story only ten days ago.

But his big heart... He loved everyone very deeply, without condition, and really expected nothing in return but a little humanity and respect.

When we were little, he knew what joy us little twerps could bring to people who needed it. We visited my great grandpas Wargo and Scurr in the hospital when we were very small... against the rules... but Dad was successful in bringing smiles to their faces.

In recent years, his big heart began to show through even more in different ways, even more as his illness progressed. He was aged not only physically, but mentally and emotionally as well by it all.

If he was like a piece of jagged glass as a younger man, the tsunami of health problems washing over him again and again, smoothed out the edges into a much more serene piece of smooth sea glass.

He was very serene, and accepting of his life.. and I think accepting of the end, too.

Too many people stand in this spot where I stand today and say something about the amazing things they've learned over the last few days, but I couldn't have possibly known anymore.

His love for his immediate family-- My mom, my brother, my sister, my wife and I... His brothers and sisters.. Especially his best pal Chuck. We should all have a big brother looking after us the way my uncle Chuck looked after my dad.

And I saved this guy for last for a reason, I'm not sure if I'll get through it. My dad and his father talked on the phone at least three

The Real Steve Cichon

times a day. Dad was pretty much homebound in the wheelchair, and Gramps is blind, and doesn't get around in the nursing home too well.

My dad would read his father the paper, and just talk with him... each of them with a pretty good understanding of what the other was going through as sickness and age robbed them of the good use of their bodies.

I think it was my dad's purpose in life over the last few years to keep his dad company and in good humor, and he did it. The relationship between those two is among the most beautiful things I've ever witnessed.

My dad would also be elated to know that he continued to give even after his last breath... He always talked about lamenting the fact that he couldn't donate his organs. But doctors were able to harvest his corneas and skin so that others might live... He'd have loved that. And he'd have loved yesterday's outpouring of love at Cannan's.. and probably would have added, "WHY"D YOU WAIT TIL I WAS DEAD!?"

More and more, people like my sister and my wife, and even I myself will catch it... Notice me acting or sounding more like my ol'man. I can't think of a greater compliment.



Gramps, Lynne, Greg, and Me, holding onto Dad for dear life, in Aunt Elaine's pool, 1984

A Tribute to My Relationship with My Ol'Man

Since dad's death, I'm amazed by the physiological and psychological effects of his loss just on me personally. I miss him, but don't yearn for him. But what I'm also finding is this scrambled brain feeling. I compare it to a program running on your computer slowing all the other programs down.

I can't properly concentrate, can't remember what I told to whom... Is my brain lost permanently? It's like my circuits are fried... did it happen with the power surge... when I knew that dad was gone? Are we connected to our loved ones in ways we don't understand?

Among the questions I'll be pondering the rest of my life.

It was in pondering these questions I had another experience that I can describe, but can't explain.

Feeling particularly maudlin and melancholy one day a few weeks after Dad's death, I was thinking about him, and thinking about my own sadness, something I've frankly tried to do very little of (putting energy into writing this has helped.)

While feeling those down feelings, my face was in the sun on a glorious sunny spring day. I closed my eyes, and let the sun beat against my cheeks and my hands, and it quickly warmed my whole body.

All at once, thinking about my dad, now laying in the sun, I felt my body begin to move. I was physically still, but had all the sensory perception of moving upward; into the sky. It was like a dream, but I was completely aware that I was awake, and could open my eyes at any moment to see all the familiar landmarks around me. The sun got warmer, and I seemed to be moving faster, soaring almost.

Not sure where this was taking me, but then a vision of dad sort of materialized. He had a big smile on his face, and there was a joy in his eyes that I'd only seen before--when he was talking about his

The Real Steve Cichon

kids to someone the day before he died. Then there was a woman, with a similar smile. She didn't look familiar; but I knew it was my dad's older sister Tricia, who took such good care of him as a little boy. It was implanted knowledge, just like when I bolted away at the moment my dad died.



Dad ready to fly...

She was there taking care of dad, and she had never stopped looking after him. She was his guardian angel, helping him through life even though she wasn't here on earth to help. Now they were both looking out for us. Happy tears were streaming down my face.

I opened my eyes and wiped away the tears. That wasn't a dream. I wasn't asleep. But what the hell was it? Was I in heaven? Did angels visit me? Did my mind travel to another dimension?

As I said, my circuits were fried, but I've never experienced anything of the sort before, and nothing in the brief time since. I still don't know how to explain this. Writing it makes me think I'm probably in

A Tribute to My Relationship with My Ol'Man

need of some heavy meds, but I'm firm in the way it happened and how it made me feel.

Another blessing brought of the Ol'man's passing, and another kick in the ass: I'd have loved to talk to Dad about both this and that instantaneous knowledge of his death. I inherited from him my healthy skepticism about such things: It's not that I don't believe that they happened, it's just I don't believe the people who are quick to ascribe these events to aliens, psychic powers, or direct visits from God.

Any or all are possible; just don't tell me you're sure of one or the other.



Dad's been gone for a few weeks now. The only time I get really sad is thinking about my grandpa, and wishing that there was more I could do for him. His heart is broken, and rightly so. I can remember my dad saying, "no parent should have to bury their child." With all the things I've been sad about not being able to tell him, there's one thing I'm glad he doesn't have to know about.

The Real Steve Cichon

Some things that I have done instinctively for as long as I can remember now remind me that dad isn't around.

My first day back at work, I choked up saying my name on the radio. People would ask the ol'man if he was the guy on the radio. He'd proudly beam, "No, that's my son.... But I'm the REAL Steve Cichon."

Whenever I call my grandpa, I tell him it's young Stevie. He corrected me last time. "Nope, you're Stevie now. The only one left." Ripped the heart out of my chest.

Walking into Denny's, I without thinking about it walked over to the "free newspaper" rack. Half way there, I realized I don't have anyone to get "car books" for anymore.

I realized, too, that I really don't give a fig about The Beatles. I mean, I love the music, but I used to eat up news about the Fab Four, even modern celebrity stuff about the guys just so I could share it with Dad.

Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr are both in the area this summer. I heard the Ringo commercial at work, and wish I could be buying tickets for the ol'man and me.

"40 years later, and people are still talking about those Beatles," Dad'd say. I was reading a story about some celebration of Ringo Starr's upcoming 70th birthday. Half way through it, I thought, 'Wait... I don't care.... And who am I going to tell?'

So I abruptly stopped reading, and moved on to the next story.

One of the great parts of my job, as I saw it, was being able to share some insights and inside information with my dad. This politician is a phony, but this seems genuine. This TV reporter is a nice guy, this one's a jerk..

Being out in the field the day President Obama visited Buffalo, I just encountered instance after instance of things I was taking note of,

A Tribute to My Relationship with My Ol'Man

only to tell Dad. I was constantly on the lookout for things that might interest him. From now on, I guess those instances will just be a time to reflect on times with the ol'man.

It wasn't all been wistful memories, though. Western New York's best gluten-free pizza (the only kind I can eat) happens to be at the pizza shop only a few blocks away from the VA Hospital.

Driving up Bailey Avenue to pick up a pizza one day after work, I sobbed with the recognition that I'd never be taking this same ride up to the hospital to see dad ever again.



Dad as Santa with his mother, and sister Marie. In Grandma's kitchen, 1983

And that shoe I promised him, as we left grandpa's nursing home a week before he died, is still in back seat of my car. Both shoes are there, actually, and will remain there until my dad can perform one more favor for someone. Maybe someone who ruined their

sneaker, or a down on his luck guy without any footwear. At some point, I'll be able to say, thank my dad for these, and give them to someone in need.

My brother, sister and I have been, and likely will forever more.. send each other random text messages and Facebook notes with the things only my dad would say.

The Real Steve Cichon

So it's not all that unusual, as a Cichon to get or send a text saying, *I Love eggs*, or *How's it goin, Budzos?* for Lynne, or, *you can be a real lemon, Steven*, or an acronym that goes way back *GDYG*. That's "Goddamn you, Gregory!" a refrain often heard passing Dad's lips as my brother misbehaved.

As I write this, I just texted Greg and Lynne that "The Ozone is coming in, and I'm moving and not telling you my new address." Two dad classics in a single text.



Halloween 82: Dad, Lynne, Greg, Steve

We'd send each other this stuff when the ol'man was around, but now it's rampant. We're each thinking of him, so we might as well try to make each other smile thinking about it all....

In the weeks since Dad died, I find myself much more calm, more accepting, more ready to clean up life and defrag a little bit-- Get rid of the unnecessary. And I find myself pondering how and why I've twice had strange supernatural unexplainable experiences. But however and whatever the reason I was impregnated with the

A Tribute to My Relationship with My Ol'Man

knowledge of my father's passing- as it was happening- I consider it a great gift. It's something I feel the need to share.



Since I'm honestly reflecting here, I also add this. I think I'm also a little more willing to be me. "Goofy." While I did care if my dad thought it was goofy, I really don't give a shit what you think. And that goes for *everyone* reading this, assuming Monica doesn't get this far. And she probably won't. So expect a little less inhibited and a little *more goofy* Steve.

Sorry dad.

Above: Me and Dad, 1978. Below, Dad and us kids, 1983.



The Real Steve Cichon

My sister Lynne summed it up best, posting this on Facebook just after the ol' man died:

My dad

He had the biggest heart

He would give you the shirt off his back or the last \$10 in his pocket.

He always put everyone before himself.

He was a very kind man... couldn't walk in his house without him asking "do you want a pop or something to eat?"

...

He was very intelligent and worked hard for what he had. When I think about him working, going to school and raising 3 kids...I just think "wow".

He loved cars. Every other day he was getting a different kind. He always wanted a convertible so I know he's up in heaven cruising around with the wind in his hair and Casey (his dog that just passed in December) in the passenger seat with giant smiles on their faces.

He had amazing ideas and dreams for himself and all of us. I know he was proud of all of us and I'm very proud that was my father! Thanks for everything you have done for me Dad! I love you and will miss you dearly! You will always be in my heart! God bless and Rest in peace.



Dad & Lynne mowing the lawn, with good ol' Buckshot on patrol. Maple St 1987.