

This was obviously the hardest thing I've ever had to write. And not just because my editor wasn't available to proofread it. Though, I could certainly hear his voice in my head the entire time, saying "What point are you trying to make here?"

We'd always land on "As long as you know what you're trying to say and you've done the work, you have to trust the audience to get there." So... good luck to you, I guess.

We are all the sum of our experience... our upbringing. All the imprints – scars, dents, and bruises – cast the mold of who we become and, in turn, use to put our own stamp on the world.

We're complicated, we're imperfect. We make good choices and bad ones. Both allow us to learn and share the valuable lessons that come in various shapes and forms along the way. In our sense of humor, the music that grabs us, in the barbeque chicken that's burnt on the outside and raw on the inside... in how we raise our children.

Well, the royal we. Though, Harper and Ellie have surely benefited from the extraordinary lives of Ziggy and Bailey... Jessica and Pam, no doubt, applied these lessons to Bandit and Marley, as well... and I suppose picked up some helpful tips for Maya, Luna, Asa, Theo, and Graham along the way.

All of it helps determine the people we become. The values we hold and the expectations we have of others – family, friends, and strangers.

Dad taught us what it meant to be humble...sure, in my case, it was often in the form of some light taunting as he continued his unapologetic win streak over his undersized teenage son in 1-on-1 basketball. But, ya know, lesson learned...

He also literally taught us the meaning of love. What it means to love your family, your country, the planet, a great song... perhaps unfortunately, Washington Football. And with love comes loyalty, but often also comes with criticism. And, boy could he criticize.

But it was almost always with a sense of humor. And, even if I didn't always recognize it at the time, I know it was because he only wanted the best for me. For us.

He loved to laugh, including at himself. His sense of humor was infectious. You couldn't help but laugh. Even when his jokes weren't funny. If only because you were forced to wonder how someone so smart could say something so, so stupid.

I'm grateful, maybe more than anything, for that sense of humor. It has served as a coping mechanism, for all of us, during some of the most difficult times of our lives. Very much, including today.

The dad abides.

He taught us to be curious. To seek knowledge. And **how** to do both.

Maybe it was out of laziness – who's to say – but any time I came to him with a question, large or small, his response was almost always the same: "Look it up."

Sure, that sounds reasonable now, but in a pre-internet world, that's a minimum of a 20-minute bike ride (each way) and a conversation with a disinterested librarian to find a **BOOK** with information on, say... the deepest part of the ocean on record.

It's the Challenger Deep, by the way. Mariana Trench, western Pacific Ocean. Just under 11,000 meters. You damn kids and your ChatGPT.

Anyway.

I'm not the first to say this today, but we were so lucky to have had the privilege to grow up as foreign service brats – little world travelers. Not just because of the incredible sights and cultures we got to experience first-hand, but, equally, because of the perspective and fresh set of eyes it always provided us to bring home and better appreciate our own country.

Sometime in my 20's, I once asked dad what he thought was the most important quality to look for in a partner. He said, with almost no hesitation, "Find someone that you can travel with."

Like it was right there on the tip of his tongue. He's right, of course. You can take yourself to the most amazing places on Earth, but without someone to share the experience with you never know when you're home.

And, ever the diplomat and globetrotter, there was no question where dad's home was. His love for our mom, his Fayla-Wee, was undeniable and served as the example of how to show up in a marriage. And while I'm sure Masha appreciates some aspects of that example more than others – and I promise this is the only comparison I'll make in public between my wife and mother – at the end of the day, because of dad's example, they both go to sleep every night without any doubt of how much they are loved.

In his final days, the adoring way dad looked at his Fay-Fay had even the caretakers, who had spent just a matter of minutes in their presence, in awe.

As I started writing this, there were a couple things I wasn't sure I wanted to bring up. The first was dad's battle with Parkinson's. And the second is a certain American fascist

movement and charlatan demagogue that embodies the opposite of everything my father stood for and the values he imparted on us through a career in public service.

As it turns out, a venn diagram of the reasons not to mention these things is a circle:

1. It makes people uncomfortable.
2. There are details that can feel pretty embarrassing. And,
3. It's an all-consuming neurodegenerative disease that hollows you out from the inside, makes you unrecognizable to yourself and those who care about you with its own insatiable, amoral, self-serving, self-destructive motivation that will eventually lead to your demise once it has taken **everything** without remorse or empathy.

We are days away from our country's 250th anniversary. And I can't help but think about how dad spent his entire professional life in her service. How he spent his final days watching the news from his hospice bed, even as we all knew he wouldn't be here for it to make a damn bit of difference. How, the day after one disease took his consciousness for the final time; another took from us his life's work as bombs fell on Tehran.

In a blink, it was all gone. Still no comprehensible justification.

Relatively early after their move to Anthem, mom would update us on how dad was adjusting to the caretakers. His patience with others hadn't been great. As he tried to fight his battles with PD silently, his frustration with himself sometimes manifested in snide remarks and verbal jabs. But, Yani, a new challenger, emerged. Dad seemed to like her and mom, as evidence of her intellect, was thrilled to report that Yani had played him in chess and won!

Putting aside that dad was already suffering from dementia, I had to check.

"Mom, I don't remember dad ever being particularly interested in or good at chess, was he?"

"No." She said.

"Oh. Ok. That's what I thought." At least he was being nice.

There's a little irony in there, I suppose. He was always thinking several moves ahead, but lacked either the patience or interest to master a game that rewards that skill more than any other. And as a result, found himself on the losing end of a match he never had a chance of winning.

Frankie wasn't a great loser. Growing up, no matter what it was: basketball, backgammon, cards, an argument... he never *let* me win. He wasn't above cheating a little, as I got older, to maintain his winning streaks. But, it made me determined to get over the hump. And he was a tough old man. I had to find the value in losing, which in turn taught me to appreciate winning. Nothing is ever guaranteed. I had to earn it. There are no shortcuts.

The people making the decisions to start a war in a region they barely understand and those who opened the door to them...

They have undone, not just my dad's life's work, but the work of generations of imperfect and some deeply flawed public servants who genuinely tried to make the world a little bit better and help their country live up to the ideals we've strived toward for now 250 years, knowing that fight is one that never ends. They stand on the shoulders of giants, attempting to cash in on the investments made by those with the foresight to see several moves ahead, but they lack the patience to understand how the game is played...and so, they too will lose, because they insisted on playing a game they never had a chance of winning.

One of the evenings I was able to get dad to watch something other than the news was to put on a YouTube video detailing the Nationals' 2019 World Series Championship run. I popped in and out to sit with him as he stayed laser-focused on the screen in a way we hadn't really seen in those final weeks, with the possible exceptions of the home movie viewings and staring at mom.

"Unbelievable." He just kept repeating.

And it really was. After a miserable 19-31 start, which put the Nats at a 0.1% chance to win the World Series and a mere 25% chance to even get to the postseason. Absolutely surreal.

He taught me to appreciate many things as a kid – The Three Stooges to develop a sense of humor; The Beatles to develop a love of music – and The Doors to develop a love of depressing music... But there was something special about our shared love of baseball. A sport that is certainly not for everyone, especially now that everyone has the attention span of... well.. Gnats.

Dad grew up a Senators fan, which meant that I grew up without a home team. The Senators left DC in '71, but I wasn't born until '83 so I only wandered in the desert for a modest 22 years, surviving on the crumbs of a passing fancy for the Pittsburgh Pirates in the Leland, Bonds, Van Slyke years – which did lay the groundwork for a healthy hate for the Braves, but ultimately more lessons in losing...

Then came a few Cal Ripken Jr. bandwagon years -- more losing -- until salvation crossed the border from Montreal in 2005. Dad and I finally had our very own baseball team.

I'll spare you tales of the lean years and repeated heartbreak from 2012 to 2018, but those teams brought us closer in a way nothing else could. And that closeness was unmistakably intertwined with every step of that magical 2019 run. We tracked the season's lows and highs, as often was the case, from opposite sides of the globe. Mom and dad were in year three of their assignment in Poland, but we would talk or text daily and even had a few opportunities during stateside visits to meet up at Nats Park.

By the time the postseason arrived, the Finvers had converged on DC leading up to Masha and my wedding, which we asked dad to officiate. And so, he was in town and holding on for dear life in the car as we raced home from the wine tasting to catch the "unbelievable" Wild Card comeback win over the Brewers. Thank you, Juan Soto.

After the two of us attended a lopsided game 3 loss at Nats Park just a few days earlier, we watched together from my basement as Howie Kendrick's 10th inning game 5 grand slam in LA dispatched the 1 seed Dodgers in the NLDS.

Unbelievable.

How 'bout during our rehearsal dinner, sneaking peaks of Anibal Sanchez taking a no-hitter into the 8th of game 1 of the NLCS? Or, the first words he whispered to me as I arrived at the altar on my wedding day -- "1 nothing, bottom 6" -- as Max Scherzer took his own no-hit bid into the 7th, ultimately settling for 7 scoreless and 11 K's to secure game 2 en route to a sweep of the hated Cardinals and exorcising the demons of 2012. For the first time in either of our lives, we got to see a Washington baseball team punch its ticket to the World Series.

Unbelievable.

In true US Diplomatic fashion, that was sort of where we thought it would end. The art of the possible. The culmination of everything we've seen from this team and the lessons I took from my father. About sports. About life. What a run. An NL Pennant.

After all, the Astros had won 107 regular season games, most in franchise history. Best record in baseball, the 1 Seed in the AL. World Series ~~cheaters~~ Champs just 2 years prior. A true Goliath.

I mean, sure, ya never know, but it was just nice to be included. By that point, mom and dad had returned to Warsaw and Masha and I were heading back home from Mexico ourselves... The honeymoon was quite literally over.

Then, a funny thing happened. The Nats stole game 1. Cool. No sweep! At least the boys wouldn't embarrass themselves.

Then they took game 2! Oh. Well, sure I mean Scherzer and Strasburg were always going to give you a chance in those games. Maybe we can actually make this thing interesting?!

Then, back-to-back losses at home and Max is a late scratch in game 5 with an irritated nerve in his neck. Another loss. Down 3-2 in the series.

Well, shit.

But ya know... as the saying goes, "Momentum is the next day's starting pitcher." Dad and I talked before game 6. All year, it was "hope for the best, expect the worst." But, suddenly, inexplicably we liked our chances.

Stras was nails in game 6. Going 8 and a third. 2 runs. 7 K's. Even a phantom baserunning interference call on Trea Turner in the 7th couldn't help the Astros after the ultimate ball-don't-lie Anthony Rendon HR two batters later. We're headed to game 7.

Un. Believable.

He is risen. Max got a couple extra days of rest, the treatment was taking, and he would start, as if there was any doubt. He gutted out 5 innings, gave up 2. American Hero Howie Kendrick banged another monster HR off the right field foul pole in the 7th to put the good guys on top. Cult member Patrick Corbin tossed 3 huge, scoreless innings as the Nats added to the lead in the 8th and 9th. Daniel Hudson slammed the door and dad and I were FTing with tears in our eyes. Three days later, we were celebrating together, in-person on Constitution Ave.

Un. Fucking. Believable. How can you not be romantic about baseball?

That season was lousy with mantras. From, "go 1-0 today." to variations of "Stay in the fight." Which turned into "Finish the Fight" and finally "Fight Finished" once dad and I gathered with tens of thousands of our closest friends along the parade route. Of course, "Bang foul poles, not trash cans" was another late addition once the details of the Astros cheating scandal broke and it became clear that not only were *our* Nats World Champs, but had also saved the sport of baseball.

But the prevailing mantra of that club came from manager Davey Martinez:

"Bumpy roads lead to beautiful places."

If we're being honest, Davey was as mediocre a skipper as there ever was, but truer words have never been spoken.

As we look around, again, days away from this country's 250th birthday, less than 4 months from dad losing his battle with Parkinson's... it sure feels like we're sitting at 19-31. But as we all gather here to remember our Frankie, in one of the spots he cherished most with the people he loved and who love him still... it's hard not to think of those words.

"Bumpy roads lead to beautiful places."

As beautiful as it is here, in Dewey Beach, the road ahead still seems pretty bumpy. Especially without people like my dad to help show us the way. Citizens and public servants like him remind us that true patriotism isn't performative. It's not about a speech or a flag or a hat with a criminal's name on it. Or pretending we, any of us, are perfect. Or dwelling on the many sins of our past. It's about standing for the rights of the person next to you, enshrined in those 250 year-old documents, even and especially when you disagree with them. It's about knowing that we are stronger together, not despite our differences, but because of them. We stay in the fight. We learn our lessons and remember that nothing is guaranteed. That everyone deserves the same opportunity regardless of their background, their zip code... or who their father was.

But I know who mine is.

I love you, dad.