

# The Man I Most Admire

A Remembrance of John Gibbons Lynch, Sr.

(August 12, 1922 - November 10, 2009)

Editor's Note: John Gibbons Lynch, Jr. gave this eulogy for his father

I want to thank Father St. Jules for such a beautiful homily. And my brother, sisters, Lorraine, and I want to start by thanking all of you for coming here to celebrate the life of our Dad. We are so grateful for your love and friendship.

And for your patience. Because I've never been known to be brief. Steve Moore, the wonderful man who did all the arrangements for this service told my sister Meg that our obituary for Dad was the longest he had ever seen. That doesn't auger well for all of you in the congregation.

We've all had some great conversations with all of you about Dad over the last few days. Dad was about as positive and optimistic person as most of us have known, even in adversity, because of a combination of a naturally optimistic personality and a deep religious faith. And the main thing that strikes me from all of these conversations is how much happiness he had in life by always thinking about others first.

Dad is my hero, the man I most admire of anyone I've ever personally known in my life. He is my model for how to conduct myself as a parent, as husband, as a family member, as a member of a community. He represents everything that is good about values that you learn growing up in a small town like Cary: selflessness, humility, hard work, family, community, and faith.

He was a child of the Depression who grew up as part of an amazing and delightful family. His brother Frank and sister Patsy both went to University of Chicago. As a middling student, Dad was only able to go to college at Lawrence University in Appleton Wisconsin through the intercession of a concerned teacher.

When World War II broke out, Dad wanted to join the Naval Aviation Cadet program. He only weighed 121, but the minimum weight for his height was 128, so when he took the exam they said everything else was OK, but they said "you're underweight. Go back and put some weight on and come back." Dad thought he was talking about maybe 6 months or 9 months, something like that, but he says be back here in 10 days, so Grandma Lynch came out to Iowa City to fatten him up. She fed him mashed potatoes and bananas and ice cream, milkshakes, everything that was supposed to put any weight on you. The night before he was supposed to go back he drank a lot of water, didn't go to the loo, ate more bananas, and when he showed up to be weighed, he just came to 127. So the Navy guy said "Just go drink a pint of water," he says, "a pint's a pound the world round." So he went in and drank a pint of water, and came back out and tipped the scale at 128, and that's how he got into the naval aviation cadet program. He became a single-

engine fighter pilot in the Marines. He was so good at wrestling and boxing (now at 127 pounds) that the brass kept him stateside for exhibitions and kept delaying his deployment and he never made it into combat like Uncle Frank.

My brother-in-law Tim gave a beautiful toast to my Dad at a dinner for family last night, and he noted that my Dad was successful in everything he did. But I think because his brother Frank and sister Patsy were better students and because he wasn't a war hero like Uncle Frank, he always thought of himself as the goof-up of the family. Consequently, despite all of his successes in life and despite being a really smart and informed guy, he pretty much believed that anything good that he was able to achieve was through hard work. That made him really humble and unassuming. I really can't say that I ever heard him say something remotely grandiose about himself even once. His small business, Lynch Data Processing, was successful, providing good jobs for up to 32 people at its peak. But it had its ups and downs, and his last great idea in business for electronic bill paying got some traction, but never broke through to the extent Dad had hoped. So I always had the sense that he was left that phase of his life with a little sense of disappointment about how things ended there.

But in my mind, he lived the kind of life that defines real success as a human being. He cared deeply about the Cary community and exemplified the best in "citizenship." He started his business with the idea of being able to support his own family, but also to create meaningful work for his neighbors, and he really looked at that as an obligation. He stayed friends with people who worked for him and with his businessman customers long after they had moved on to other things, just as he did with college friends and neighbors who became friends for life. Despite the very long hours that he worked as the owner of a small business, he was very active in community affairs. He was a devoted and active parishioner in St. Peter and Paul church, a Cary Youth Baseball and girls' softball coach. We knew about that because we were there, but most of what he did was under the radar for us kids. He was active in the Rotary, the YMCA, and President of the Cary Chamber of Commerce. He founded the Cary-Grove-Oakwood United Way, and later served as President of the McHenry County United Way and on the Illinois United Way state board of Directors.

And Dad was totally devoted to his family. His marriage to my Mom is my model for how I want to conduct myself as a husband. He was faithful, respectful, and loving. In a world where marriage vows are sometimes taken lightly, my Dad was there for my Mom through everything. When we were growing up, every night, he and my Mom would be up in the living room having a glass of sherry and talking about their days. We kids were running around downstairs, plotting mayhem and mischief and trying to kill each other. My parents were oblivious. They talked for an hour or so each night. Not reading the paper, not watching the TV, but just talking with each other about their days. Pretty great. And when Mom got really sick in 1996, Dad sold his company and until she died in 2005, he took care of her every day...even in periods when she would not speak for months at a time. Devotion.

My sisters and brother and I really think of our Dad as a saint. But he had several noteworthy flaws. Beth and her girls made those beautiful poster boards that were on display at the funeral home last night with pictures of Dad... and I saw a lot of plaid. A lot of red plaid to be specific. Lorraine had her work cut out for her.

And Dad was very good natured and easy to laugh, but let's face it – he had a very limited joke repertoire that tended toward the corny. Here was his favorite joke that he told me maybe 1000 times: “A man walks into a restaurant and orders a steak. The waiter arrives at his table and the man notices that his thumb is on the steak. He asks, “Waiter, why do you have your thumb on my steak?” “Well, you don't want it to fall on the floor again, did you?” Yeah, it was about that funny.

Okay that flaw's not so bad, but here's one....He was unbelievably stubborn...when he wanted something to happen, it was very likely to happen. Disagreeing with him about how to handle some family matter was like pushing on a wall—you could do it, but it isn't going to change anything. If I'd call him to say we wouldn't be able to attend some family thing, he wouldn't argue, but he was so darned persistent and pleasant that eventually we'd be there. Lorraine gave me an extreme example of Dad's stubbornness. Lorraine has had to deal with a lot in her life, having lost two husbands to cancer before Dad. I asked her why, with all that, she agreed to marry an older guy like my Dad. She explained that when he asked her to marry him, she tried to say no... and he *just* wouldn't take no for an answer. Stubborn guy. Welcome to OUR world for the past 50 years, Lorraine!

And Dad was a Lynch, which means that when we were growing up, he had that famous Lynch temper – which, growing up, usually was directed at Casey and me as the two primary goof-ups in the family. But I remember that if he got mad and said started yelling at the dinner table about something we'd done, he'd call us aside in the morning and say, “I want you to know that I apologized to your mother for losing my temper last night.” I'm pretty darned sure that they never when to bed still simmering about anything. They were great friends and companions for 50+ years. So one of the lessons I've tried to apply to my own marriage is to be quick to apologize. I hope I'm as loyal to my wife through thick and thin as my Dad was to Mom.

And as much love as my Mom and Dad had for each other, they were totally devoted to family – their own kids and their extended families. My Dad worked his head off all of his life. But he always had time for us. ... from helping to start a girls' softball league when there was nothing like that in Cary for the girls, to teaching me wrestling when I was at high school and being there for all of my meets...without offering tips after the meet about what I could have done better. We were encouraged to do well in school, but I never felt remotely pressured, despite my consistent under-achievement.

He had advice about general values.

Fun and self-deprecation: “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.”

Thrift: “I could make a meal off those chicken bones.”

Anti-elitism: When talking about a laborer, “there is dignity in any job done well.”  
Purposefulness: “Plan your work and work your plan.”  
Industriousness: “Go! Make! Do!”  
Responsibility for your own mistakes: “Be a leader not a follower.”

But on the big decisions like where to go to college, what to choose as a life work, who to marry, he and Mom listened and supported without ever breathing a word of advice about what to do. That’s one I think my kids wish I’d mastered better. He was just a wonderful Dad.

Our social life as a family mostly involved getting together with extended family on the Wyman and the Lynch sides. We were lucky to have that growing up, and he and our Mom made a lot of life choices to make that happen. I know that Dad was a favorite uncle because he took so much interest in his nieces and nephews, organizing fishing trips, horseback rides, boating excursions. He was keen in his interest in them and in his desire to make sure that they were having a great time too when we were all together. When we all grew up, he and my Mom took a similar interest in the kids’ kids. They were there for every wedding, every baptism, confirmation, graduation... you name it.

He was a man who had his priorities in order. My best wish for my own kids is that they live a life like his.