

## Samuel Voth Schrag's Tribute to Don Schrag

I can only remember one time that my father lost his temper with me. I was pretty young, but old enough to know better than to mouth off to my mother in front of company. After pushing him a bridge too far, he dragged me back into our study, where he prepared to administer corporal punishment with a yardstick. But even at his most frustrated, he wanted me to know that he was not striking in anger, but rather because I needed to know how far over the line my behavior had been. Naturally, I suggested that in the morning, he would know for SURE he wasn't doing it out of anger, and would be confident that was administering justice with complete impartiality. The fact that this stunt actually worked is due in no small part to my father's self control, and careful deliberation in all his actions.

Dad always thought of his roles in life as having the greatest significance: parent, lawyer, friend. Tasks that required utmost care, great love, and a healthy sense of one's own inadequacy to the task. As a father, he always honored me with a deep concern for the power he wielded, and his sense of the potential he had to do good or ill to these vulnerable creatures he helped bring into the world. It was this deep concern that shaped his efforts as a father.

Frequently his fears that we might face the world unprepared due to his negligence led to adventures in the 'manly arts' those skills that he felt no adult male should be without. Despite the gendered overtones of this notion which have often given me pause, these efforts have been a great blessing. They haven't always been successful- Piles of uncompleted model airplanes, a motorcycle whose engine was sadly never overhauled, and my continued inability to smoke a cigar speak to the failure of some of his efforts. But even in the month of October when mom and I worked on construction of the railing in the stairway in their home, so he might make the wearing journey upstairs a few more times, Dad delighted in overseeing the project, teaching me about the finer nuances of stud finding.

As much as I treasure these skills, it was the encouragement of courage and the invitation to compassion that were his greatest gifts to me. I was a shy and unassuming child, and Dad felt it was his calling to invite me to reach beyond my comfort zones to discover the world around me. To begin with this meant forcing me to ask librarians about books I wanted if I was going to read, or ordering from McDonalds if I wanted food. It extended to wonderful adventures with him around the country, from cliffs in Cambria to the halls of power in Washington D.C., and even overseas in Honduras, and concluded in sending me off on my own adventures in marriage and ministry. In my journey toward self reliance and an open heart toward the world, my father stood always on the side of courage, reminding me that in order to live fully, you cannot give in to fear.

Finally, my father taught me about love. He taught me that just the emotion of love is not enough- that relationships need careful tending if they are to fully flower. Gifts were always carefully chosen, invitations given out with concern for those who might be feeling left out or who could interpret things the wrong way. He delighted in postmortems of sermons and case studies from Faith and SLMF that I brought him, as we thought together about how to be a redeeming presence in the world. His careful handling of a new daughter in law was magnificent, welcoming her wholeheartedly into the family. The blessing he and mom put together at our wedding will we always cherish.

Even more, it was in love where he shared most freely and spontaneously, in outpourings of affection, whether that might be in an unexpected hug, sword fighting with Joe and I, the always embarrassing public displays of affection toward mom, or a single tear on his cheek at my wedding. There have been many things that I have doubted in my life. The love of my mother and my father for me has never been one of them.

We had many hours over the last three years as Dad's been dying of cancer to reflect on the meaning of life, and he finally found me as interested in his advice as he was in giving it. I asked him once about his advice to me as a potential father. This is what he said.

As a parent, you'd like your children to do well at the big things. yet we spend so much time on little things. Right performance, right manners, not to cause offense. I hope you remember that what you really want is children who are brave, who are strong, who love and are loved, who are happy.

It is in no small part due to his deliberate efforts that I can say I am brave, I am strong, and I am happy. Thank you my father, and goodbye.

## Joseph Schrag's Tribute to Don Schrag

When my father and I were discussing what it was that I would say here today, he made only one request. He said to me "keep it short." As I thought about what it was that I was going to say to quickly encapsulate the man that my father was without going on and on and going against the one guideline he had given me, I realized that the best gift I could give here today would be to try to share my experience of having him as a father. To me personally that was his greatest role and the great shame is that only two of us, rather than everyone here, were able to experience a lifetime of the joy that having him as our father brought, and will continue to bring as we live as the men that he helped us become. What I learned from my father was that being a father is most importantly about two things: love and lessons. These two things are not really separate, they must be intertwined together so that every lesson is taught because of the love of the father, but the love does not keep the lessons from being doled out, even when they are difficult.

I remember a conversation that Dad and I had during one recent visit to Kansas. He said something to the effect of "I'm glad that you didn't give up on us." I told him that if anyone had a right to give up in our relationship I thought that it was him, and that I was glad he had kept loving me through all that I had put him through. He just looked at me and said "There is nothing you could do to make me give up on you." That kind of unconditional love is a powerful thing, and I am so glad that I have been able to experience it in my life. I don't think that everyone gets that purity of love from people in their life.

Beyond simply loving me though, my father was a great teacher. I didn't always want the lessons and didn't always appreciate them at the time, but now I will miss hearing them every time I am lost or have a question in my life. Dad was full of all kinds of idioms, axioms and other various sayings that were unique to him. I think a big part of this was because I always saw him as a lover of words and the different things that you can do with them, the different ways to communicate. This love of words is one of the greatest gifts that he passed on to me.

I think though, that my father's greatest lesson was about the way that we treat other people. Through the things he taught me, and even more so, through the actions I saw him take, his life was a constant lesson about the dignity of others and the respect that they deserve. This didn't mean that he didn't get angry, that people's failures and shortcomings didn't bother him at times, but through it all there was this overarching knowledge that everyone, no matter what, was deserving of respect and had an innate human dignity that it is our duty to acknowledge. In my life I try to live up to this standard that was set for me. I am so glad that I was given such a wonderful example to follow.

There are of course many more lessons to share and stories to tell about my father, but someone very important to me did make but one request about this memory of him so I will save all of those for other times, hopefully spread out across my entire life so that I can always continue to be in some way a continuation and growth of the wonderful man that was my father.

## **Tribute to Don Schrag**

### **December 20, 2008**

On Sunday afternoon, I sent an e-mail to the Morris Laing family notifying everyone of Don's death. On Wednesday, I was sitting at my desk when an e-mail notification popped up on my computer screen, advising me I had received an e-mail — from Don Schrag. After I recovered from the initial surprise, I opened the e-mail. It was a response to Sunday's e-mail, and it read: "Nice job, Karl. Try not to screw up my memorial service. Don." Obviously, one of my partners with a very dark sense of humor had access to Don's e-mail. I begin my remarks with this anecdote, not to make light of our grief, but because the e-mail sounds exactly like the reply Don would have sent, and I think he would be disappointed were there no laughter today.

I had the privilege of knowing Don as a law partner at Morris Laing, a mentor, a church brother at Lorraine Avenue Mennonite Church, and a friend for 23 years. I can't convey in the next several minutes everything Don meant to our firm, to his clients, to his church, and to me. But I'll mention few things that made Don special to us, and relate a few stories, and hope to capture a small part of what he meant to his colleagues and others.

Don had one of the best analytical minds I have known. His ability to analyze an issue, to see how all parts of a transaction fit together, and to give solid, practical advice was unparalleled. Whether in Sunday school class or a Board meeting, when Don spoke, you listened, because you knew he had thought long and hard about the matter. He rarely spoke without having something to say. Don was the guy everyone in the firm went to when faced with a difficult legal issue or complex transaction that needed further thought and analysis. The standard refrain at the firm has long been "We better run it by Don." I have no doubt the mantra will be "What would Don do?" or "What would Don say?" for many years to come.

Comments received from other members of the Wichita bar confirm that those outside the firm recognized the quality of Don's legal mind. One attorney who called the firm to offer condolences wryly noted that, with Don's death, there was a precipitous decline in the average intelligence of Morris Laing attorneys.

I learned from Ed Nazar that Don's analytical ability was evident at the commencement of his legal career. Ed first crossed paths with Don over 30 years ago, when both were walking out of the bar exam. Don was walking a few feet ahead of Ed, and Ed heard him ask the person next to him: "Did you recognize the Rule Against Perpetuities issue?" Ed writes: "I immediately had this horrible, sinking feeling. It took me many years to forgive him."

Don had great humility. He accepted praise graciously, but always tried to deflect it. I understand he specifically requested that no one make "glowing comments" about him today – I don't think he had a clue how highly his colleagues and clients regarded him. About two weeks before Don's death, Roger Theis sent Don an e-mail advising Don that he had run into Tom Page and Terri Ginther of Emprise Bank at a restaurant. Roger wrote: "Both were very interested in you and asked me to give you their regards. Tom said as long as there is an Emprise Bank your philosophy is going to be part of its fiber. They always ask themselves 'What would Don do?'" (sound familiar?). Roger received the following reply: "Thanks for relaying the kind comments of

Tom and Teri. Given the lack of confidence I have in any of my advice, it is un-nerving to hear that people may have given it value.”

The last time I remember Don being at Sunday morning worship, I was sitting near the back, and Don and Donna were in the row in front of me. Behind them was Lucille, a long-time member of our church. Lucille is in her 90s, and walking and standing are a struggle for her. Don was getting weaker at this point, and wasn't standing to sing with the congregation. But I noticed that he stood for the final song. I later commented to him about this, and he asked me if I knew why he stood for the final song. Getting choked up as he spoke, he told me that he noticed Lucille, struggling to stand for every song. He said, "By God, if Lucille can stand to sing, I've got no business sitting."

Don was one of those rare people I call "gentle souls." I think this gentle nature explains his extraordinary love of babies. There's a long-standing "baby rule" at Morris Laing: If you bring a baby to the office, you cannot leave without stopping by Don's office so Don can hold it. Some referred to this as "receiving Don's blessing." Ten babies have been born to Morris Laing employees since Don's diagnosis in 2006. I'm almost certain each received Don's blessing.

Having heard some admittedly glowing things about Don, you should also know that there were moments when we caught a glimpse of another side of Don, the side that earned him the nickname "the Mad Mennonite." Such as the moment when A. J. Schwartz learned the hard way that one never, ever touches Don's dice when he's on a roll at the craps table.

This final story relates another of those moments. Those from Morris Laing have heard this many times, but I doubt any of Don's clients have heard it, and I'm almost certain the members of Lorraine Avenue haven't heard it. You'll have to excuse the profanity, but its important to the story. This was perhaps a defining moment of Don's legal career, a moment. when the "Mad Mennonite" emerged from the quiet, non-confrontational, Mennonite guy from Pretty Prairie.

AJ and Don were engaged in a substantial transaction, in which a large New York City firm was on the other side. They were meeting at the New York firm's offices, and had been meeting all day, negotiating the final form of the main document. Don had been bothered all day by a particular provision. He kept asking what it meant, and why it needed to be included, and kept insisting that it just did not make any sense. The lawyers dismissed his concerns, telling him the provision had been in hundreds of agreements they had drafted, and he shouldn't worry about it. Late that night, as they were about to call it a night, Don wanted to talk about the troubling provision again. He again asked what it meant, and why it must be included. The New York lawyers again dismissed his concerns, "it's been in hundreds of documents", and so forth. At this point Don had heard enough, and pounded the table for emphasis: "I don't care how many agreements its been in, it makes no goddamn sense!" They ended the meeting on that note. The next morning, the New York attorneys distributed the new draft of the agreement incorporating the revisions they had agreed on the day before. Not another word was said about the offending provision, but it was gone. Because Don was right.

It is with great difficulty that I say goodbye to Don today. I want to pound the table and say “This makes no sense.” But, as Don well knew, it’s not about making sense, or fairness. It just is. So I’ll do my best to accept Don’s passing with gratefulness for having known him, with as much quiet dignity and grace as I can muster. After all, that’s what Don would do.

Karl Swartz