

Leo Abair's Eulogy

I am Marilee, the namesake of my parents, Mary and Leo...actually, there was an airplane named Mary Lee piloted by a young lieutenant in the south pacific five years before I was born.

On behalf of my family I want to thank everyone for all the support that you have given us over the past few days. Your friendship throughout the years meant so much to our father and to all of us.

I would also like to mention Dad's nieces and nephews... you were all very special to him... and you made your Uncle Leo feel very special, as well.

I would personally like to thank my entire family – “Team Papa Bear” ... my siblings, our spouses, the grandchildren and their spouses, and the great grandchildren... for coming together with love in their hearts and a common goal.. to give Papa the best quality of life we could in his final years with us on this earth.

I have no idea how we could have done this without the entire village.

I know in Dad's obituary, we gave a extremely well deserved thank you to Mark and Sam. I would also like to thank John and Betty for years of roll modeling what it means to sacrifice for the people you love. For all those years the rest of us didn't have to worry about Mom and Dad while they were in Florida.. and your continued care throughout their lives. We thank you....

An now ...I am honored to deliver my father's eulogy

Like the sands through the hour glass,
so are the days of our lives.

These are the words that began Dad's and Mom's favorite soap opera which they watched together for over thirty years..

Dad's grains of sand numbered over 35,000. Hence the long obituary.

Through those many days there were countless memorable episodes. I will share with you a few of my favorite scenes.

The fact that the Colonel had retired didn't mean that he stopped giving orders.

In 2011 when Dad returned from Florida, he found the basement at his home flooded, and the level of Lake Champlain rapidly rising. Eventually, the lake level would reach over 103 feet nearly 2 feet more than ever recorded. At age 93, Dad directed the campaign to save his property by guiding the efforts of family members, friends and neighbors to battle the raising water and relentless winds. Ever the commander, the Colonel stood at his command post in the sun room and oversaw the operation for three weeks until the water finally subsided.

Another favorite is Pops saying to several of us at different times...that he wondered why if we were so darn musical that we never sang in harmony. So finally, as a Christmas surprise one year we got together and learned Winter Wonderland and a few Christmas Carols. We planned our last rehearsal at Phil and Julie's the week before Christmas but Mom and Dad came back to VT before that rehearsal and weren't about to miss this party so we put on our Christmas Show a week early in the same living room where it all began. Dad was quite impressed and touched! Since then we have gathered on Charlotte Street the weekend before Christmas to celebrate family and go Christmas caroling through the old neighborhood...young and old...all generations of Abairs. It is pretty sweet..

For Dad's 90th birthday we sang “What a Wonderful World” arranged in four part harmony by Phil. It was a song that always brought a tear to Dad's eyes.

It's hard for me to imagine what it would have been like without music in our lives. It seems as though every occasion involves singing around a piano or with guitars around a campfire. A connection we will always share.... and will always smile and remember Papa.

Dad loved going out to see his kids perform. First Night, Breakwaters, Snow Farm, the Lincoln Inn.. you name it, he was there. I think he even enjoyed the not-so-gifted musicians, like myself, getting up and singing...I think he did, anyway?

Dad would often say that he was the oldest person he knew... and with most of his friends and family gone, he enjoyed being with our friends. His house and the beach have always been open to them...as so many of you know.

Dad's high school class, the Cathedral class of '37 and my class, the Rice High School class of '67 gathered together at T Ruggs at least three times for our class reunions... how dad loved all the attention he received from my classmates. Thank you all for that.. It was awesome...

On most days about mid-afternoon Dad would locate his TV remotes and say "I wonder what the crazies are doing today?" This meant he was tuning in to Fox News which usually meant we would have to listen or leave the room.... but then came the day that dad got new hearing aids which could pick up the audio directly from the TV and therefore we could mute the sound which was great... except every once and a while we would hear him happily "snickering" which probably meant someone would have taken a pot-shot at a politician he didn't like.

When asked by one of his doctors on being found in good health after a check-up, "What is your secret, Leo?" He replied .. a walk every day, one drink every day and "CRISPY" bacon.

His daily drink would usually happen before lunch shared with some family members. They would raise their glasses and say in French "Premiere coup aujourd'hui" (First drink of the day) .. often a facetime, video or pictures was sent to other siblings and in-laws to let them know what they were missing.

In his and Mom's early years in Florida his daily cocktail was often at Happy Hour when they gathered with his sisters, Bertha, Gladys and Bea and brother Bob and Aunt Edna ..usually for a Manhattan before an early bird dinner special. The tradition continued with John and Betty when they moved to Florida and included visiting friends and siblings with their families notably the Sheas, Cains, McCabes and Barrets.

One of Dad favorite meals was brunch and his favorite spot in Florida was First Watch which served a great breakfast with CRISPY bacon... when he order the bacon it was always accompanied by (a snap) so they would know exactly what he meant. He also liked a bloody Mary with his meal but unfortunately this restaurant had no liquor license. So the colonel took matters into his own hands (or pockets). He would bring a small bottle of vodka and order tomato juice and ice and when he thought no one was watching he would pour it in. It use to make me nervous but then I realized he really was fooling no one as whenever he showed up for brunch the waitresses automatically would bring over a glass of tomato juice, a glass of ice and a lemon.

Dad liked pizza at least once a week for lunch but his theory was that it only tasted right when the sun was shinning..and, so in Florida it was usually Tuesday but in VT we had to work around the weather a bit.....and of course, when he order the pizza, he would always say ... you know what.. yes, CRISPY bacon as one of the toppings.

You might think from all this that Dad was a big drinker but that was not the case as it was actually, just one drink a day!

He told me once that he only had one drink because he didn't want to ever embarrass his kids.... I just laughed thinking of all times we must have embarrassed him.... and told him that I would let him know when we were even.

One of my favorite memories...was a Christmas Eve at Broadlake many years back ...and there were a bunch of us still hanging around in the wee hours of the morning singing. John and Betty were spending the night.. the couch was opened up in the middle of the living room. Dad was sitting in the middle of John and Betty who were already in their pj's while the rest of us surrounded the bed on chairs and stools... Phil or David on the piano.. someone with a guitar in hand....It was magical.. we were having so much fun. I remember wishing that all my friends could experience this moment as it was filled with so much joy ... the singing, the laughing There a

pause, and Dad looked at us and said, "You know, it really doesn't get any better than this!" I felt like I had never heard that saying before.. It was so profound... because for the first time I knew exactly what he meant.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the relationships that Papa had with his adoring grandchildren. He loved them each, uniquely...in a way that made them all feel a very special connection to him. It was a wonderful gift gave to each other.

Any mention of Dad's life begins and ends with his beloved Mary, his companion and dearest friend for nearly 75 years. Dad put up with a lot from his 9 rowdy kids but when it came to anyone hassling Mom, the policy was zero tolerance.

His finest hour in her mind was when her father, Bert Leddy or Babo, as he was known to his grandchildren, suffered a stroke at age 80. It was Dad who took the lead in his care, enabling him to remain at his home until just before his passing.

Not too many years ago, a stack of love letters that Dad had written to Mom while in the service during the war re-surfaced. It revealed a side of our father that we had never know... that of a talented and romantic writer.

One request that Dad made as he helped us prepare for his passing was that the photograph of a young Mary Leddy that he carried with him to the South Pacific and back, one that has been in his wallet ever since was to go to his grave with him...those of you who were at his wake probably saw it ... it is with him now with him.. close to his heart.

In years past, at different times Heidi and I have both been regulated to sleeping on the landing outside my parents bedroom in Florida when the condo was filled to the brim...We both overheard my mother say the same thing to dad right before closing their eyes... she said to him, "Good night, my prince"

Dad was always so grateful for what he had... he truly believed that someone had always been watching over him. These last years when we were taking care of Dad... and helping him get ready for bed... tucking him in and saying good night, he would always say, " Thank you for the nice day .. thank you for everything you do". ... followed by an exchange of "I love you"s.

So, as we tuck you in the last time, Pops....we thank you for all the nice days you have given to us... and more, we thank you for everything.... and we love you too, Pops...

Good night to our wonderful Prince.... good night.