

Roger Aaron '64

Eulogy

by Peter Aaron '92

You all know my dad. Some of you have known him longer than I have. And if you knew him at all, you know that I can't sum him up in five minutes at a funeral. What I can do, perhaps, is offer you a few mementos, little memories that make me smile, and might give you an extra grin when you think of him.

Pop, you probably already know, was tough as a roofing nail. This is common knowledge. On a typical weekday - at 7am - you'd find my father in the Skadden gym, putting a healthy fear into any young associates who might have thought that partners in their 60's would be slowing down. Of course, Pop's message of staying strong extended beyond the workplace. I recall one particular lunch with my father at DB Bistro. Daniel Boulud came by our table, ostensibly to say a quick hello to



Peter '92, Roger '64 and Todd '96 Aaron

a good customer, and I looked on in amazement as Pop not so subtly suggested to Chef Boulud that, while we loved his restaurant, maybe Daniel himself should be spending a little more time in the gym.

Pop wore tailored suits on casual Fridays. When Skadden moved from 919 Third Avenue to 4 Times Square, they designed the offices with light 'modern' colors, no doubt meant to lighten the moods of young associates pulling all-nighters on a deal. Pop would have none of it. He had his office appointed in dark oak. He just thought it set a better tone.

So, Pop was tough, but Pop had jokes. Often when you'd least expect them. One of the last real conversations I had with my father was on Wednesday evening, watching the Duke – North Carolina game with my brother Todd. Not being a big sports fan, I asked the only question that readily came to mind: "What the hell is a Tar Heel, anyway?" Despite having fairly little voice left, Pop piped right up, "It's when a turtle is crossing the highway and gets run over by a truck,

and its heels get smushed into the tar.” You might imagine that was the morphine talking...you might just assume he was a Duke fan...but if my own sense of humor is a little quirky and odd, I think I really did get that from Pop.

Pop offered us many, many life lessons, some more meaningful than others. He gave us the advice that I imagine most boys get from their dads:

- always give a firm handshake,
- always remember to protect yourself,
- if you hold something soft in your fist during a fistfight, you're less likely to break your fingers

Pop also had other advice. We were driving once on vacation, it might have been in San Diego. The whole family was in the car, and we were lost. So we looked to my father, our guiding intellect, for a plan. Stop and ask for directions? Head for the Interstate? Call Grandma Phyllis? Pop shrugged off our concerns, got to the next intersection and made a left. "When you're lost," he advised his two young sons, "try turning left." We did, eventually, get home.

Pop has deservedly received a great deal of credit as a wise decision maker. This has not invariably been the case. My father actually has a storied history of enormous success with his second choices.

As a young man Pop was a gifted scholar and athlete, and his five years at Dartmouth and Tuck brought him some of his closest friends and most enduring connections. However, Pop's plan was not to go to Dartmouth at all – he initially had his sights set on Yale. His second choice seems to have had an enormously positive impact on his life, so no one's complaining.

Similarly, Pop's forty-four years at Skadden gave him endless joy and satisfaction. My father's original plan had been to work at a major law firm in Cleveland. His New York bride convinced him to give Manhattan a chance, and once again, Pop's second choice turned out to be a source of great satisfaction for everyone involved. Other examples abound - my dad fared better with his second car, second apartment...some would say with his second son.

However, there is one choice where I know my father believed he hit the jackpot on the first try. That, of course, was the decision to share his life with my mom. Mom would say that Pop has taken care of her for 40 years. The way she completely devoted herself to my father's care these past few years makes it at least an even trade. My parents love for one another has been the guiding example in Todd's and my lives - that lesson,



more than any other, may be the gift our father gave us that we'll be passing on to future generations.

It's going to be incredibly difficult to plot our lives without Pop in them. If my mom is the heart of our family, Pop has always been the 'head' and I don't know how we're going to move forward without him. If we get lost along the way, I can tell you the first thing we're going to try, we're going to try turning left!

I don't really want to end this eulogy, because I know when I'm done, I'm really going to have to say goodbye. Pop was not known for his patience with drawn out speeches, so I'll bring it to a close. I love you, Pop, and I'll miss you.

Eulogy

by Bill Barnett '64

I am deeply honored to have been asked by Ginny to offer some thoughts on a friendship with Roger that has spanned 50 plus years.

I know full well that each of us here today arrives at this place from a different experience and relationship with Roger and his family. I speak as a friend. I speak as a deep admirer of a remarkable man. I will not use these few minutes to regale this congregation with personal stories - some funny, some poignant. I will try to speak for all of you - us - who valued his friendship and were immeasurably advantaged by it.

I recall vividly when Roger and I first met. Early September 1960, two excited young men feeling our oats in Hanover, New Hampshire celebrating our freedom and trying to find our way in a new and complicated world.



Roger Aaron and Bill Barnett

And, sadly, I remember the last time I saw him, a couple of months ago, having visited the Aarons in their apartment, I knew full well this moment, this service, was fast approaching - - - much too fast. As I left their home, I fought back tears. I was deeply saddened, as are we all today.

This service, however, as sobering as it is to acknowledge his absence, should be a celebration. We should express our collective thanks to our God for the gift of intellect, loyalty, love, and extraordinary accomplishments that marked his life.

Roger Aaron excelled at everything he chose to try to do - with the possible exception of golf - but everything else.

Be it a pickup basketball game or an abstruse course in philosophy at Dartmouth or managerial economics at Tuck School or torts at Yale, whatever he did, he did well. . . . so very well far better than most. He valued learning at these institutions and supported them at every turn.

His success came from a sharp intellect, an incomparable work ethic. Roger knew right and wrong. In a society so seemingly focused on entitlement, his life and focus was on accountability: to his family; to his clients and associates; to a cause; to a friend.

He did not suffer fools, nor did he accept mediocrity in anything. To some he might have seemed impatient, and he was, but he spent his life building the quality that he demanded. He wanted, and expected, quality efforts around him. Yet, despite a steely focus on excellence, he exuded empathy and warmth at every turn. His hard charging exterior could not mask a caring spirit and a most generous approach to people and causes.

He was fiercely loyal. He encouraged and supported in good times and bad.

He had pride and expressed love for the institutions he helped build or for which he was responsible and the people who helped build them.

He loved his parents, Phyllis and Hy. Phyllis would tell you that he never gave her one day of trouble in her entire life other than when he played sports and repeatedly took the basketball to the hoop too hard, ending up in the hospital with a broken arm - and on too many occasions.

He loved his wife. Ginny's role in this partnership was far more than the patient and loving support system she represented in these last months. He admired her intellect and her capacity and her judgment. They fed off each other's energy and skills. They respected and understood one another's needs.

He loved Peter, Todd, Jessica and the munchkins, a name he often used to refer to his grandsons, Nate and Will. He was so proud of all of them and hopeful for their future. He loved his sister, Carolyn, and Elliott and their family. He loved the Falkenbergs, Ginny's sister and her family. He supported everyone who made up his family team.



Roger and Nate

And to know Roger, you must know he loved Skadden. I can recall visiting him in the Fred French Building in 1968. I think Peter Atkins and Roger were the 18th and 19th attorneys in a firm they helped build to a much, much bigger number today. He admired Joe Flom and the attorneys and associates of Skadden because they shared his energy, passion, and commitment to problem solving and executing and winning for all of the right reasons, and they did it with a common ethic he espoused so fervently.

Roger Aaron's moral compass knew only true north. He set such high standards for everyone. He set a higher standard for himself.

As Roger was losing his battle, it would not be a surprise to anyone here that he seemed frustrated, depressed, and enervated. Perhaps it was the fight itself and its pain and its hurt, just as it would impact all of us. Perhaps it was the loss of the opportunities he so relished, the chance to work with his teammates on a specific project, knowing that his position would be listening on the phone and being relegated to a smaller role than he wanted or than he spent his life contributing. Or perhaps it was the personal losses that he saw coming, such as the opportunity for him and Ginny to walk down the beaches of Sullivan's Island in South Carolina with Will and Nate. Or perhaps it was because the very fact of his weakening state did not meet his own standard of energy and involvement and success that his life so brilliantly represented.

Whatever he tried to do, he tried to meet the expectations of his family, his clients, his partners, and his friends. Roger Aaron never failed at anything of consequence. He just never failed - until he lost this last fight, and left us all adrift in a world made less full and less secure and less hopeful by his absence. Like you, I already miss him.