

## **BOB STERLING'S FUNERAL HOME EULOGY**

First off, I want to thank everyone for coming out today to remember my father and to honor his memory. He was a unique figure, and I'm certain he'd be happy that all of you were here to pay your last respects.

I'd like to give special acknowledgement to Al Trzeciak, who was as loyal to my father through the years and right to the end as any brother or son could ever be. Thank you so much for everything, Al. We will forever be grateful for your sincerity and kindness.

I have a brief presentation, and I hope you'll indulge me for a moment or two.

I suspect the first question anyone has when they learn that a person has reached 100 years is how he or she did it. What's their secret, what's their advice for lasting a century.

Well, my father didn't have any secrets and, while he had plenty of advice, none of it had anything to do with growing old.

But I can tell you a few things about him that might provide a clue or two about his longevity.

First and foremost, he lived a clean life. He took care of himself; he was active, and he tried to stay engaged at whatever level he could for as long as he could.

My father was also a proud veteran. He always said the pilots he got in shape for combat during World War II were the greatest group of young men he'd ever been around, and they were a source of inspiration to him his whole life.

His interaction with them as he supervised their physical training at U.S. Army Air Corps airfields in Albany, GA, Jackson, TN, Sumter, SC, and Ocala, FL, set him on a years-long path of helping young people chart their lives prepared for whatever may come their way.

He was next a mentor to many of his players at Rutgers, a number of whom stayed in touch with him over the years, most especially his freshman basketball team of 1950-51 that went 11 and 3 and avenged two of those losses.

Dudley Tighe from that team is here today, and I'd like to give him special recognition. There couldn't be a finer example of how my father wanted his players to turn out in life than Dudley. As an aside, Dudley was in the same class at Millburn High School as my mother's youngest sister, Mary Jo, so we've always considered him family.

My father then took his mentoring to Piscataway, where he fought for every penny he could -- to get the sports program off the ground when the high school opened in 1957 and then to make sure its athletes had the best equipment, coaching and

facilities that money could buy during his 30 years there.

While it's mostly forgotten now, Piscataway's first high school coaches were men my father brought over with him from Rutgers.

I have no doubt that the success in sports the school has achieved since its founding is due, in some part, to the foundation he helped lay more than a half-century ago.

But what Bob Sterling would want to be remembered for most was being a good son to his mother. She was the most important person in his life and someone he mentioned all through the years right up to his final breath.

Praxeda didn't have an easy time of it. Her husband – my father's father – died in Newark three months after my father was born during the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918 that claimed the lives of millions of people around the world.

She remarried within a couple of years but then her second husband, Levi Housel Deats, died in 1930, leaving her and her three children to fend for themselves in a big city as the Great Depression was just kicking in with its unrelenting cruelty.

Somehow, they made it through with hard work, perseverance and unity, though it clearly took its toll on her.

Even under those hardships, my father always went to school clean, well-dressed, well-behaved, eager to learn and prepared for the day, including for his morning, afternoon and weekend jobs and for his baseball practice and games in the spring.

He truly lived by the standards she laid down for him as a boy, and he carried them throughout his entire life as the hallmarks of his essence – present yourself well, be fair, be honest, work hard and do the absolute best you can at whatever you choose to do.

My father also had deep respect for Frank Schiller, who owned a German butcher shop on South Orange Avenue in Newark near where my father's family lived. My father worked in the shop as one of his jobs growing up, and Frank was the person who loaned him the money to go to college.

That meant so much to my father that he continued driving into Newark on Saturdays in the late 1940s and early 1950s to give Frank a hand in the shop on his busiest day, long after our family had settled in at faculty housing at Rutgers.

There was also Vinnie Farrell, head of recreation in the City of Newark who took my father under his wing as a kind of surrogate son and got him into coaching and basketball officiating.

Last but certainly not least was the love of my father's life, my mother, Florence O'Mara Sterling, a woman he met at Panzer College in the late '30s, who married him in 1943, gave birth to their three children and stayed by his side proudly until her death in 2004.

Without these four people in his life during his formative years and beyond, my father wouldn't have become the man he became and, I have no doubt he would want me to mention them today, they were that influential.

As a final thought, I'd ask that my father's life be celebrated, not mourned. His years were long and full, and he lived as healthy a life as any human being could

ever hope for. He literally died of no medical causes other than old age.

Instead, remember the impact he had on so many lives. Yes, he could be tough and authoritarian. But my father didn't just play tough, he was tough in a way that struggling to make it through each day at an early age under extremely trying circumstances will make you.

All you had to do was watch him take control of a basketball game the moment he stepped on the court and you knew he was all business. I saw it many times, on occasion in hostile environments, and he never blinked an eye.

If he was hard on you, it was because he saw in you your potential and wanted to bring it out and make you better. Believe me, he was just as tough at home as he was on the job.

There's a quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson, the 19<sup>th</sup> century essayist, philosopher and poet who remains one of America's great thinkers, that I feel sums up my father's approach to his lifelong work with young people.

Emerson wrote: "Our chief want in life is somebody who will make us do what we can."

That was my father. He helped us do what we can and, for many, that made all the difference.

May he rest in peace, and again I appreciate your show of love and support.

Guy Sterling  
Sheenan Funeral Home  
Dunellen, NJ  
April 14, 2019