

Remembrance for Gorden Hedahl Jul 31, 2021

I often say I grew up in a green room. Now when I say that, most people think I'm speaking metaphorically, another way of saying that I grew up in a theater family. But I mean I grew up coloring and playing cards right next to a theatre. It was marvelous, a place of pure imagination. Even if occasionally when playing with one of Dad's very kind students, they would hear their cue, put down their Uno cards, and say simply "The show must go on" before entering stage left.

Of course for my father this room was something else, another of many classrooms, a place to teach the techniques of the craft, to inculcate lessons that went far beyond it and to forge life long bonds. In fact, his last trip outside of this area, was a sojourn to join a mini-reunion of some of his first students over 40 years ago. There were of course other green rooms, other classrooms, offices, church halls, and early morning meeting rooms.

Through it all Gorden almost always had a smile on his face, and a tie around his neck. I believe that for him this was not a symbol of formality—you only had to look at the ties he wore to know that—but rather a particular kind of success, for he was in many ways more successful than his family could imagine. No one in his family had gone to college before, so it was perhaps too much to imagine that he would not only earn three degrees but become a professor or a dean. My father spent the first several years of his life in an old farmhouse without running water or electricity, so it was perhaps too much to imagine that the last play he directed would be available streaming on the internet. My dad saw his own father, all his father's brothers and sisters, and his own little brother, Jeff, die of a hereditary disease before the age of 40, so it was perhaps too much to imagine that he, also a sufferer of the same syndrome, could provide us all 75 years of cherished memories.

But perhaps not. Perhaps his mother and grandmother could imagine it all, or at least something like it. After all, Gorden's grandmother kept bills for 29 cents she couldn't pay during the depression until her death to remind herself *and the rest of us* that better days were ahead. Better days are ahead. Gorden's mother must have been able to envision those kinds of better days as she struggled to reinvent her life as an accountant, after becoming a widowed mother of three before she was thirty.

To the boy they called Gordie, a boy who could envision tales with sprites and nymphs casting enchantments; tales in which hand bags suddenly and mysteriously appeared and disappeared with perfect coming timing; tales in which giant monsters struggled to learn to yo-yo. Why wouldn't all that be possible? Isn't it for dreams just like that that the show goes on?

So today dad, despite the circumstances, we are grateful. Grateful that your life was filled with love. Love from and for your wife Jean, love from and for your family, your students, and your friends. Grateful that you filled our lives with not only love, but with laughter, with lessons, and with tales of wonder. Grateful that a western North Dakota boy who didn't have the opportunity to get a passport for much of his life literally got to sail the world.

But mostly we are grateful that you taught us that in life as on the stage our time is so short, we don't have moments to spare. So we must be fast to brighten the hearts of those who have decided to spend some of that time with us. We must be quick to love; we must hasten to be kind.

And lastly we are grateful that you taught us that we should make the most of what we have and not waste our time complaining about what we do not, for in life as in the theatre, the great show must go on.

But I hope just this once you would indulge us a moment's delay, a chance to pause and appreciate how much brighter the lights seemed to sparkle when you were on this stage with us, and I hope we can all remember that we need only conjure your memory to see those lights sparkle that way again. Love you Dad.