

My Father's Eulogy by Ray Pascali (2/28/2018)

Before I begin I'd like to thank Cousin Reno for his many phone calls and visits. I always enjoyed listening to your conversations. It was a tremendous learning experience for me and I gained an appreciation for the great friendship you shared with my father. Do you know what else I appreciated? The Tastykake pies you would bring my dad. I always knew when you visited because his top drawer would be filled with pies. Believe me I had my share. Blueberry was my favorite. It was my serving of fruit for the day.

In the last few days, I've seen some sad faces, especially in my own household. I think we should be reminded that death is where the pain ends and the memories begin. Today I'd like to share some of those memories with you. Before we visit the back roads of my memories, I'd like to tell you about a dream that I had.

I often share my dreams with my wife but she hasn't heard this one. I can see her rolling her eyes now. She must be thinking, "Oh no, not another one of his crazy dreams – here we go again."

I had a dream that my father had died. As he stood before the pearly gates, he could not help but wonder how he got there. He began to worry that if they knew half of the

things that he had done, they might never let him in. Then a voice on the other side spoke to him.

My father was born of Marie Desiderio and Attilio Pascali on a cold day in Philadelphia on the 27th day of December in the year 1928. His mother, Marie, one of six children, was born in the United States. Her family immigrated to the United States from a town called Chieti in Abruzzi, Italy. His father Attilio, also known as “Atti”, was from Ascoli Piceno, Italy. Atti was proud of his newborn son. He would go on to father three more children – boys all. He was a good father that thought the world of his four sons. Wherever he went, he brought his boys with him. My father recalls at time when he took them to the bar and let him sit on the stool alongside of him; giving each a small taste of his beer.

Atti was talented and a hard worker. He would purchase a home; install a radiator heating system that is used today and complete a correspondence course through the mail. He could fix almost anything. He was artistic and could paint or draw down to the finest detail. To earn his citizenship, he served our country in the Great War. Sadly, he would never see any of his children reach their teenage years.

My dad was named after an Italian professor (teacher), Dominico Pascali, his paternal grandfather. He spent his early

childhood attending Saint Barnabas catholic school and playing outside with his friends.

Life was simple.

Children were not hypnotized with “texting boxes” and “dot-com machines”. Organized sports were an anomaly. Baseball was played in the street with a sawed-off broomstick and an air ball. When the ball deflated, it was split in two and the game continued as half ball. Games like Kick the Can, Hide and Seek, tag, and his favorite - shooting marbles were popular “street” games. Everyone knew how to skip rope and “go around the world” with a toy yoyo. If you fell down you got back up. Fighting was clean and forgotten the next day. You could walk to the store, or the park, and stay all day and never worry about safety. Manners and reverence for others and their property were displayed. Most of all parents demanded and received respect.

My father shared a close relationship with his dad. One Sunday morning he heard a group of teenagers talking on how they were going to go to the Eagles football game. My dad mistakenly thought they were inviting him to the game. After hurrying home to get money for a ticket he returned to the corner only to find that the older boys were gone. He ran home crying. Upon seeing this, his father promptly took him in

his truck to Municipal stadium with money for a ticket. At 8 years old my dad had witnessed his first Eagles football game. Unfortunately, the birds were crushed by the Bears. My how the times have changed!

The family will soon face a tragedy.

In 1939, Atti was admitted to the Naval hospital on South Broad Street to be treated for an enlarged heart. My grandmother would say the rosary daily as well as pray to St. Jude, the patron saint of lost causes. She took my dad and his brothers on the bus for visits. On their last visit, a strange feeling came over my father as he walked to the bus stop on South Broad Street. He turned and looked up at the hospital. Their stood his father by the window - he was waving goodbye.

His father's condition did not improve. He was moved back to his home on Lindberg Blvd. Shortly thereafter, my grandmother summoned my father and his 3 brothers to their father's bedside where he would see his father for the final time. His father's last words to his 10 year old son were, "Dominic you are the oldest, you must take care of the family." Two days later his father died.

After his death, my grandmother declined an invitation to move back to Italy, opting instead to relocate her and her 4 young children to a modest apartment on Warnock Street across from the Moyamensing prison in South Philadelphia. My

father attended 6th and 7th grades at the Annunciation school on Wharton Street in South Philadelphia. Here they would be closer to her family where her mother and father, Verino and Aida Lepre, ran Desiderio's bakery at 13th and Reed Streets.

Desiderio's bakery was known for the tastiest bread in all of South Philadelphia. Grandpa Desiderio was an expert on wheat. He could identify the grain type by merely rolling it in his fingers (winter, spring, summer, and fall). At times my father helped by tossing dough and accompanying his Uncle Frankie on the bakery truck that proudly displayed the inscription - **Desiderio's Delicious Bread**. Perhaps his most important function was staying out of his grandfather's way and keeping quiet while he slept after a hard night's work. The bakery is still in operation today under the name of Faragalli and they are still using some of the same equipment that Grandpa Desiderio used many decades ago.

At the age of 12 my father was enrolled in the Scotland Military School for Veterans' Children. Founded in 1895, Scotland Military School was the only residential school in the nation, specifically designed and accredited to educate and care for the children of Pennsylvania military service veterans. He was eligible to attend Scotland because his father was a veteran of the First World War.

[\(http://www.residentialeducation.org/members/scotland-school-for-veterans-children-scotland-pa/\)](http://www.residentialeducation.org/members/scotland-school-for-veterans-children-scotland-pa/)

He always spoke highly of his years at Scotland where he was affectionately known as “lefty”. He was a good athlete and participated in many varsity sports including: football, baseball, and track. Although track was his best sport, his proudest memory occurred during his last varsity baseball game in his senior year. The score was tied in the bottom of the seventh. Behind in the count 0-2, with two of his brothers in attendance, my father ripped a fly ball over the right fielder’s head. By the time the relay through reached the infield, dad was crossing home plate for the winning run. He was recognized at the Monday morning meeting by the school superintendent and received an ovation from the student body.

Shortly after graduating Scotland in 1948, he enlisted in the United States Navy and served for two years. He spent the earlier part of his enlistment at Jacksonville, Florida. The majority of his final year of service was spent at the Willow Grove Naval Base working in security police. Being at Willow Grove enabled him to help his mother who was home living by herself.

After being discharged from the Navy he was hired as a sales clerk at Gimbel’s department store at 8th and Market streets. While working at Gimbels he competed on the store’s

basketball team. The highlight of his career at Gimbels was winning the basketball championship against an undefeated John Wanamaker team. With seconds remaining on the clock and Gimbels down by one point, my father intercepted a pass in the back court and took it to half court and made the game winning basket as time expired. Working at Gimbels was his first job as a new decade began but not the last.

Enter the 50's – and the age of steam.

Locomotives transported goods and passengers across the country on magic carpets made of steel. It was around this time when my father accepted a job working as a brakeman for the B & O Railroad. He was responsible for assisting with braking a train when the conductor wanted the train to slow down. At times he would be assigned to several cars, and be required to operate the brakes from atop the train while the train was moving. This was a dangerous job and these tasks are no longer utilized today. Automatic air brakes have eliminated the need for the brakeman to walk atop a moving train to set the brakes. However, it was not the dangers of the job but the inability to gain full time employment that forced my father seek opportunities elsewhere. What a pleasure it was to visit the B&O Railroad museum 20 years ago. My dad came with us and it was as if we had our own personal tour guide. This one even sprang for dinner!

In 1955 he joined one of the oldest police departments in the nation, the Philadelphia Police Department. Although he scored higher in the Civil Service test for fire fighter, he felt he was best suited for police work. During his 30 years of service, he was assigned to many important departments including: police radio, K9, and stakeout unit. However, his first assignment was the 19th district in West Philadelphia.

The 19th is a microcosm of the city, it extends from some of the most expensive homes in the city in the north to hardcore urban neighborhoods in the south (Vick, Karl, Time 8/24/2015).

Police work can be a dangerous job. On an early afternoon while answering a call in the 19th, he was the recipient of a gunshot wound. According to my father it was no big deal. But it was a big enough deal to be reported in the Evening Bulletin. After a short hospital stay he was back on the street.

There were many other interesting moments as well. One morning he observed an African American youth sprinting down Lancaster Avenue. There was no mistaken this young man, he was easily recognized throughout the streets of West Philadelphia and would shortly be known citywide. Quickly, my father went into pursuit. Within seconds he maneuvered the patrol car behind the young man. As he made his approach he realized that his efforts were in vain. He would not be able to

offer the tardy student a ride to Overbrook High on this day. You see, all 7 feet 1 inches of Norman Wilton Chamberlain was simply too big to fit in the patrol car.

My dad had many friends in the police department. One of his closest was Chuck DeRaven. Chuck and his wife Nancy set my father up with a date with one of Nancy's friends, a girl named Louise Brown (my mother). Shortly thereafter, they would be married on February 20th, 1961. On April 8th of that year they would purchase a twin house in the Bells Corner section of Northeast Philadelphia for the whopping sum of \$17,500. This is where they would raise three children residing there for almost thirty years.

When you have a policeman for a father you knew that you aren't going to get away with much. To know my father was to know of his quick temper. It was his way or the highway. At times I was living with the Great Santini. Chitty Chitty Bang Bang would become my nightmare. I lived inside chapter II of Joe Torre's childhood that he vividly recalls in *Chasing the Dream*.

I did escape his wrath on one misdeed. When we were young we often played ball in our back driveway. Occasionally we would break a window. This prompted my father to install a Plexiglass window in our basement door. One day I was standing atop of our drive holding a nerf football. I said to my

friend, “see that window, it’s Plexiglas, you can’t break it, watch I’ll show you.” I then reached back and fired the ball right into the window - the ball simple bounced off. Then I retrieved the ball and said to my friend, “Watch I’ll do it again.” This time I reached back and threw a perfect spiral right into the center of the window. Smash, the window shattered into a thousand pieces. Just then my father pulled up in the car. I turned to my friend – he was gone. To my surprise, my father did not notice the broken window as he went into the house. When I came home from school the next day I saw my father at the bottom of the steps cleaning up the broken glass. I sheepishly asked him what happened (as if I didn’t know). He said, “I’ll tell you what happened, one of your friends broke my window and when I find out who did it I’m. . . No need to repeat the rest of this.

After 30 years of police service my father retired from the police department in 1985. He developed new hobbies such as reading, exercising and vitamin therapy. His medicine cabinet was filled with every vitamin from A to Z. His favorite books were the Holy Bible and the medical dictionary. In a short period of time he was able to quote scripture, interpret the Book of Revelations, and make his own medical diagnosis. He cherished his retirement years spending time with his grandchildren and enjoying the extra hours of sleep while

listening to the early morning sounds of automobiles as they hustled down Summerdale Avenue on their way to work.

Unfortunately, as he approached his mid-80's his health declined. He spent the past few years in the care of the Delaware Valley Veteran's Home. We thank the staff at the Veteran's Home for the excellent care they provided my father. When I moved my father into the Veteran's home in the Fall of 2013 I knew that I was in "Heavens Waiting Room". If anyone in every having a bad day or feeling down, I invite you to take walk through the corridors of the Veterans Home. It is a humbling experience. I would also like to thank the people who helped us along the way with visits, gifts and phone calls. I won't mention any names because I am likely to forget a few. Believe me when I tell you that I can be quite forgetful. Just ask my wife how many times I locked the keys in the car . . . with the engine running . . . and the dog in the back seat.

I would like to remember those who helped my father that are no longer with us. My grandmother, for raising 4 small boys on her own. My dad's father, for his dedication to his family. My mother, Louise Pascali, for the hardships she endured. She remains "ever gentle on my mind". His friend Harry Duffy for his loyal friendship. Maurice "Cap" Heckler for providing discipline and being the father figure that was missing in his life. Most of all, I would like to thank our Heavenly Father

for sending an angel . . . that looked over my shoulder . . .
being forever near . . . speaking to me in times of trouble . . .
making sure every “I” was dotted and each “T” crossed, being
present for late night hospital stays and critical medical
procedures. It will be remembered always.

We shared some tough times together (looking at Diane).
There were many late night hospital stays, broken pipes,
flooded bathrooms, moving heavy furniture. But we had some
good times as well. We dined in the finest of hospital
cafeterias. You can always remember how I manually started
my father’s sump pump after a heavy thunder storm.

Now we have come full circle.

Time marches on - but memories last forever. As I awoke
from my dream, the alarm sounded and a George Strait song
began to play. The words that were spoken to my father sang
out to me loud and clear. They said, “Let me tell you a secret,
it’s about my Father’s love, it’s a secret that my Daddy said was
just between us. Daddies don’t just love their children every
now and then, it’s a love without end – Amen.