

Eulogy for Wallace Clift

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The purpose of life is to increase the volume of love in the universe.

Such a simple sentence. We have centuries of religious texts and philosophical thought available to us, with many wonderful ideas that can help guide us as we make our way through our lives. But this simple sentence! For me it has become a touchstone that I try to use to judge my past actions and to guide the decisions I need to make.

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My father did not think of this himself. The image comes from William Temple, who was Archbishop of Canterbury during World War II. What my father did was to recognize its elegant truth. It was a central theme of his last book, which my wife Karin was deeply honored to edit for him: "How to Make Love, and Other Godly Thoughts". Dad had a sense of humor.

Teaching me the purpose of life: that's a job well done for a father! But that was just the cherry on top. I'd like to go back a bit farther, and tell you about some of the other gifts I received from this wonderful man.

We've all been hearing, in the past year, of the many awful ways that some men treat women. Degradation, humiliation, ... and obviously much worse than that. I can't tell you how foreign such behavior feels to me. My father was a true gentleman. A true gentle man. I've spent my life trying to follow his example. It's a hopeless cause, I realize. My family have all been hearing stories from people whose lives were touched by his teaching and his compassion. For myself, I try not to annoy people with bad software. Had my parents not been so far ahead of their time, had they not understood personality types, had they not celebrated each of their children's individuality, then perhaps I would feel worse about not living up to him. As it is, I just try to be a gentleman. (And to write software that isn't annoying.)

But I digress. My father was a gentleman, and what I consider the strongest of men. Many men in the 1950s would have been intimidated by one of the very few female lawyers around at the time. Not my father. He wanted a partner -- an intellectual and spiritual partner. He always knew that women really ARE equal.

Now imagine what it must have been like to be their child, watching how they interact. The power of my parents' love, the power of their relationship, continues to make itself felt through the generations. I have two brothers-in-law whom I respect so deeply. My sisters chose wisely. My niece has chosen one of the kindest men I've known. I haven't had the opportunity to get to know my nephews' significant others as well, but I feel like I know a lot about them already, simply because my nephews have chosen them to be their life partners. And finally, my father's

youngest grandchild, my daughter Rachel. She is 16, and she has her first boyfriend this year, Seth. It became official one day on Facebook. Despite coming from an awful family situation, Seth has somehow become one of the kindest, most thoughtful teenage boys I've ever met. Seth is a gentleman. I don't know how he got that way, but he did. And I believe that he is in our lives because my father was a gentleman.

Now I have a story to tell you about myself. I wasn't always the lively and vivacious person you see before you today. (Well, OK, maybe I was never vivacious.) But as hard as it may be to believe now, I was once a sullen, brooding teen. (I know, right?) I would like to tell you how this horrid phase ended. One day I was driving Dad home. Happily I don't remember what I had said to him that day, but as I pulled to a stop in front of the house, he put his hand on the door, looked down toward the floor, shaking very slightly, and said "Could you be ... nicer to me?" He then opened the door and went inside. I sat there staring down the street. What was wrong with me? Why was I pushing so hard against people who were never in my way? I've always felt like his simple question that day snapped me out of my childhood. Such a simple sentence, yet so powerful because it came from him. A man of such kindness, driven to speak harshly. And that WAS actually harsh for him.

Finally, I would like to say a few words about the family that my father built, along with the love of his life. It all started with their love for each other. A love that was made known to them both immediately. (If you don't know the story, ask any of us -- we would love to tell it to you!) Dad couldn't have known at the time that his bride would come to embody that elusive ideal of feminism: a woman devoted to her family, but who does not deny her own aspirations. She was a wonderful mother, and we often didn't make it easy. But her nurturing nature did not keep her from discovering her own calling, as an Episcopal priest and pastoral counselor. As she was fond of saying "life began at 50."

And my sisters! I think of Anne as a mirror that, no matter what is shone upon it, reflects love back to the source. Anne responds to every group email, whether celebrating an accomplishment or conveying worrisome news. She responds with love and hopefulness. And she uses reply-all to share the love. (Me, I'm not really a Reply-All Guy.)

I suppose most of us here know Lucy. We know her boundless energy. We know her optimism in the face of adversity. Optimism, perseverance, ... and generosity. Years before they were ready to hear it, Lucy started pulling our parents toward Olympia. What an incredible gift Lucy, Michael, and their entire family have given my parents in their years here. What a gift they have given us all.

This is the family that we were blessed with. This is the family my father built. I think we can all agree that my father, by any measure, did more than his fair share to increase the volume of love in the universe.