

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

The fragility of life

My father died of a heart attack in 1950, before I reached my second birthday. I have no recollection of him whatsoever.

Sitting in a restaurant with my mother sometime in the mid 1980s, I said, "So how long did it take for you to get over daddy's death?" And she said, "I never got over it. I'm not over it yet. I just had a dream about him two nights ago."

I was very surprised. To me, he was a picture on the wall, a collection of stories, someone from the distant past. To my mother, of course, he was continually alive in her thoughts.

As I approach my 70th birthday later this year, I have a much better understanding that, even as the decades pass, there are people long gone who stay with you all your life.

Rodney Lore

I attended elementary school in the Mt. Lebanon School District, just south of Pittsburgh. My best friend, and someone I secretly envied, was Rodney Lore. He lived in a new split level house, just down the block,



Rodney Lore

where I spent a lot of time. His father was a steel company executive. He had a stay-at-home mom and a glamorous older sister named Pam. Rodney had a lot of sports paraphernalia, the latest toys, and a complete baseball card collection, including the hard-to-get

Mickey McDermott.

In 1959, my mother moved us back to Reading, and I never saw Rodney again. But ten years later, a Pittsburgh friend wrote her that Rodney had died. He graduated from Mt. Lebanon High School, and Northwestern University with a degree in business administration, and then joined the Marine Reserves.

He had a severe reaction to a routine inoculation and died about a month later.

Jack Rudolph

Back in Reading, my new best friend at Northwest Junior High School was Jack Rudolph — again, someone I secretly envied.

Jack's father was a highly regarded physician. In those days, it was not

unusual for doctors to practice out of their homes, with their office on the first floor and their apartment upstairs. Jack's living room, dining room, kitchen and parents' bedroom were on the second floor. Jack's bedroom, together with his older brothers', who were in medical school, were on the third.

The Rudolphs had air conditioning — wow! — and a color television. I liked being at their house. I remember Jack collected an enormous number of presents for his bar mitzvah and gave me some leftovers.

I last saw Jack in 1962, before we moved to Allentown when my mother was transferred in her job with the American Red Cross.

Years passed, and I was sitting in The Mercury newsroom in April 1975 when I glanced at a headline in the *Reading Eagle*:

Doctor Kills Son and Self

"Dr. Herman L. Rudolph, 66, chief of physical medicine and rehabilitation at the Community General Hospital, fatally shot his 26-year-old invalid son and then turned the gun on himself in their second-floor apartment at 400 North 5th Street about 2 p.m. Monday, police reported.

"... the physician was being treated for emphysema and his son suffered from multiple sclerosis, a debilitating and usually terminal disease for the last several years."

Jack was diagnosed while a student at the University of Pennsylvania and was never able to start a career.

I marvel at how many decades of life I've enjoyed that these friends never got to experience. I'm embarrassed that I envied them, or anyone else, for their material possessions.

It's not surprising that people tend to feel more grateful and content as they age. Life is precious, and the closer we come to the end of it, the more we appreciate what we have.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton



Jack Rudolph