

GIVE ME THE ROSES

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Years ago in the 1960s, as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Philippines, I heard a song that continues to echo in my mind. The singer was Bill Marburg, one of the staff officers in charge of twenty or thirty members of our group. He was also a folksinger in real life, who used the name Bill Clifton in his musical career. He wasn't my Regional Rep, but one evening he put on a concert for the volunteers, and I remember many of the songs to this day.

My favorite was an old Carter Family song called "Give Me the Roses," and I'd like to begin my paper with this song, for it frames everything that follows. But rather than recite the lyrics, with the permission of our President and the assistance of Dave Edmundson, a far better musician than I'll ever be, I'd like to sing the song to you. Dave and I, along with two other folks, performed this piece in concert a couple of months ago, but my father didn't hear it then because of illness. It's important that he – and you – hear it now.

Give Me The Roses While I Live

*Wonderful things of folks are said
When they have passed away
Roses adorn the narrow bed
Over the sleeping clay*

*CHORUS Give me the roses while I live
Trying to cheer me on
Useless are flowers that you give
After the soul is gone*

*Let us not wait to do good deeds
Till they have passed away
Now is the time to sow good seeds
While here on earth we stay*

CHORUS

*Kind words are useless when folks lie
Cold in a narrow bed
Don't wait till death to speak kind words
Now should the words be said.*

CHORUS

This song, of course, is a plea for us to celebrate the life of a loved one long before his or her demise. And to that end, I'd like to reflect on the life of my father, Henry Winkler, who is here tonight after a long time away, as it has become harder and harder for him to get around. This is not a biography, more a reflection, from my own perspective, on what I take to be important episodes in a long life over the past 95 years. These are the roses I hope he'll enjoy

A few years ago, my father wrote a kind of memoir recounting the course of his life for his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. It was, truth be told, fairly dry and too historical, and upon reading it, my daughter Jenny, now 40 years old, protested saying, "But Grandpa, you haven't told us anything about your love life," to which he replied, "You haven't told us anything about yours."

That wasn't really true – Jenny wore her heart on her sleeve, and we were certainly privy to the ups and downs of her social life in the years before she got married. Yet it did reflect the fact that there were – and are – significant areas that remain dim. I can't really fill in those gaps in my father's life, for he usually kept his personal emotions to himself and we can only speculate about what took place. But I can reflect on patterns that seem most important to me.

My father was always a good student. The first of six children, he excelled in school, so much so that he skipped several grades. That meant that he graduated from high school at an early age, perhaps 15 or 16. He must have been a gawky adolescent, smaller and younger than most others in his class. My wife Sara and I fantasize about him going to his senior prom with a girl two years older and six inches taller. But the truth is we really don't know. And our sense is that he probably didn't date much at all. His father moved from one job to another, meaning that my father attended one school after another. His salvation was the track team, for he was a good runner, and it probably saved him from dropping out.

After high school he enrolled at the University of Cincinnati. His family had been living in New Jersey, and there were certainly good schools closer to home. But this was in the midst of the Great Depression, and his parents had no money at all. College was only possible because his Aunt Jenny, his mother's sister, who had just gotten married and now lived with her new husband in Cincinnati,

agreed to legally adopt him so that he could attend college here. And so he came to the Queen City.

He flourished, once he was able to put aside his family's insistence that he become a doctor – a real doctor – and get out of all of those science courses that gave him trouble. But he found his niche in the world of History, and made his mark. He was well known on campus, and everything was moving along smoothly, until, with his father out of work, he had to leave school for a time to return home, which was now Waterbury, Connecticut, to work in a clock factory and support his family. He hated that interlude, for it took him away from what he loved, but he survived it, and returned to school with support from the New Deal's National Youth Administration. I've always known him as a lifelong Democrat, and the NYA certainly cemented the case.

Somewhere during his UC years, he met my mother. Or she met him. She asked him out first – which only underscores what I imagine to have been his awkward, gawky nature – and they went to a dance at her UC sorority. I can't contemplate him dancing without seeing him stepping on her toes, but he survived and the rest is history. They married. He finished an MA at the University of Cincinnati, and then they went to the University of Chicago, where he had full support to study modern European History. All was going smoothly until Adolf Hitler moved into Poland, and eventually Russia, and the Japanese decided to bomb Pearl Harbor. Philosophically my father was something of a pacifist, for he had studied long and hard about the ravages of the Great War.

But recognizing just how important the stakes were, he left graduate school to work for a year at the Office of War Information in Washington, D.C. It was the nation's propaganda agency, about which I wrote in my first book, and then, pacifist inclinations notwithstanding, he decided to join the military. As always, he felt the need to accept his responsibilities. This had been true when he left college to work in the clock factory. It was doubly true during World War II. And it remained a keynote of his character. With a Phi Beta Kappa key, he was eligible to enter a new program to train Japanese language officers, and so he and my mother, along with another couple – best friends from UC – went to Boulder, Colorado to study Japanese, 8 hours a day, 6 days a week, for the next 18 months. And then he shipped overseas, serving in the commands of that megalomaniac Douglas MacArthur and others in the South Pacific. That meant he was overseas when I was born. Indeed, I didn't meet him until I was about a year and a half old, with whatever consequences for my long-term emotional life.

He returned to the United States, intent on moving ahead with his career. He took his oral exams and immediately got off on the wrong foot. One of the members of his committee was an outside examiner, who simply assumed that my father was responsible for an earlier time period than he had studied. The visitor began to ask questions about that period, and my father, reluctant to protest the mistake at the start of such an important exam, floundered miserably. At long last, the examiner said, "Well, Mr. Winkler, perhaps we should talk about something you do know something about," and the results were better after that.

But then he had to write a dissertation. He wrote for months with me by his side, and I must not have been very helpful, for he sent my mother and me back to Cincinnati, and then finished the draft in short order and was ready to find a job.

Rutgers University beckoned, and he came. And so I really grew up in the New Brunswick, New Jersey area. I remember it being a comfortable time. We lived for the first 7 or 8 years in University Heights, a collection of very cheaply-built apartments that had gone up during the war and were now reserved for young faculty families. You could hear neighbors' conversations through the paper-thin walls, and I remember the development being something of a dump. But it was cheap. And best of all, it had a powerful sense of community. My parents became close friends with lots of others their own age from all parts of the university. And there was an equally large cohort of children my own age.

I grew up in those years thinking of my father as an athlete. As a youngster, I accompanied him to Rutgers University track meets, where he volunteered as an official. Only later did I learn that he had once been a runner himself, a 49.4 second quarter-miler, which was more than respectable back in the days before lightweight shoes and all-weather tracks. Largely because of his example, I drifted into track in high school, and became a pretty decent half-miler, and later a respectable marathon runner. But I never managed to best my father's quarter mile time.

Later, I remember him playing squash, a sport I took up in college. I recall on one occasion he drove that hard rubber ball into the scrotum of a colleague, who had been trying unsuccessfully to have a child, and after that painful episode, the wounded friend and his wife were able to start their family. My father always seemed to feel that he was godfather to the children, and I suppose in some sense, errant shot notwithstanding, he probably was.

But his athletic career came to an end when he was diagnosed with a heart murmur. Years later, when my son David was born, he too had a murmur, and once the doctor looked, he found that I had one too. It turned out that it was simply the way the Winkler hearts sounded, nothing to worry about, and I was given permission to continue running marathons. It was too bad my father had to give up sports when he did.

My father wasn't much of a handy man at that time, indeed, if ever. Once, not long after our family arrived in New Jersey, he decided to put in a garden behind our apartment. We had little money at the time, and I'm sure he justified this effort on financial grounds. He dug out the entire plot, which must have been a huge job, and planted corn and tomatoes. And then he came down with the worst case of poison ivy I have ever seen. I remember him suffering with boils inside his nose and mouth, and other orifices, lying naked on the bed, since he couldn't tolerate any clothing on his skin, hoping that the high-powered steroids being pumped into his body would begin to act soon. He recovered in time, but that was, as I recall, the last garden we ever had. And, to the best of my

knowledge, he has never wandered out in the woods since. Indeed, he seems somewhat mystified by my own love of the outdoors.

As a young faculty member, he came up squarely against the administration as Senator Joe McCarthy reared his ugly head. This was the era of the great anti-Communist crusade, and institutions all over the country were vulnerable. Scores of academics who may have voiced radical sentiments or belonged to left-wing groups earlier in their lives now found themselves called to Washington to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee and to answer that haunting question: "Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?" Dick Schlatter, one of my father's closest friends, was called to testify about his activities at Harvard during the 1930s, and he refused to cooperate and survived. Moses Finley, a young classicist, was less lucky. The Rutgers administration attacked him for his principled stand, and against the protests of my father and the very few who weren't afraid to speak up, fired him from his job. Finley landed on his feet, receiving offers from both Oxford and Cambridge, and went on to become one of the most distinguished classicists in the world. Years later, recognizing the error of its ways, Rutgers gave Finley an honorary degree, though that hardly made up for what it had done at the time.

My father always believed that writing was important. From the time I was in high school, he went over the papers I had to turn in at school. Though I had a number of good teachers in my later years, he took it upon himself to teach me how to write clear, crisp prose. I could see the results, though I resisted the

process, and gradually became more and more comfortable with putting words on a page. By my senior year, though, I decided I'd had enough, and refused to share drafts with him any more. But by that time I already knew how to write.

My father claimed he never applied academic pressure, and from his own perspective, I suppose that was true. I never had to face either carrots or sticks to be persuaded to perform well at school. But I operated with the unspoken assumption that this was simply something I was expected to do. And as I flourished in school, I remember my father's take on the business world, that stood in stark contrast to his view of the more highly-valued academic life. I recall his critical comments about those who devoted themselves to making money, rather than encouraging the life of the mind, and in retrospect it's clear what he hoped I would choose. The irony is that over time I drifted into the academic world while he became – as a university president – the equivalent of a CEO. But the truth of the matter is that as President of UC, he deserves a tremendous amount for credit for keeping academic values foremost in mind, in the face of all kinds of hostile challenges, and retaining the trust and affection of the faculty, which, as we all know, isn't always an easy thing to do.

My father enjoyed his 30 years at Rutgers. When he arrived in the late 1940s, it had just become a state university, but was far smaller and less distinguished than it is today. He published a first book, then a second, and by all accounts was a superb teacher. Once, when I was in 9th grade, my mother took me to hear his annual Western Civ lecture on the Holocaust. This was at a

time when there was far less literature about that gruesome catastrophe, and certainly far less awareness. He knew about it, more than most, and drew over a thousand listeners into a class that normally contained about seven hundred, as people came from all over the university to hear what he had to say. Over the years, as his career flourished, he moved up the academic ladder, receiving tenure, then a full professorship, serving as department chair, and for a year, as acting associate dean.

In the mid-1960s, when I was a sophomore in college, he was offered the position of editor of the *American Historical Review*, the most distinguished journal in the field of History. He continued to teach half-time at Rutgers, and went down to Washington, D.C. by train for two days, one night, each week. Once, just after I arrived at Yale to start my PhD, in a first class we were asked to look at the first and last issues of the *Review*, and to describe what we found. I was insecure, sure I was in over my head, and then a classmate (who later became a fast friend) said somewhat pompously, "Everyone knows about J. Franklin Jameson (the first editor, and one of the founders of the American Historical Association). But who the hell is Henry R. Winkler?" I kept my mouth shut, for while I knew all about Winkler, I didn't have a clue about Jameson. But my father did leave his mark on the *Review*, and from personal experience, I can say with certainty that it was a whole lot more readable then than it is today.

Those Rutgers years included my mother's illness. Just before I entered high school, my mother had a small lump removed from her breast, and it proved

to be malignant. Cancer turned our family's life upside down. A couple of days after that first surgery, my mother underwent a radical hysterectomy, for the conventional wisdom was that this procedure, with no hormone replacement, would help keep the disease at bay. But to this day I'm haunted by scenes of her catatonic on the couch following electric shock therapy to try to counter the depression she endured. Over the years, my father kept the household together, as my mother lived another 13 years, and while she got better, she was never entirely well, until the cancer finally got her in the end. But it couldn't have been easy for him. And it was certainly harder for my sister Karen, four years my junior, who effectively lost her mother at the age of 8 but never had the chance to talk about what she was missing or what she had lost until years later as an adult.

I remember my father being at loose ends after my mother died. By this time, he had drifted into academic administration at Rutgers. First came a deanship. Then he became provost and executive vice-president. He always claimed that he moved into administration because of my mother's illness. Though he was an outstanding scholar, it would have been harder to leave home on research trips when she needed support, and so he began to play a major role in helping the university run. And it turned out that he did so supremely well and enjoyed the satisfaction of a job well done. At one point, he served for about six months as acting president of Rutgers when Ed Blaustein, the president, suffered a major heart attack.

My father had his work, and he enjoyed what he was doing, but it was clear that he was intensely lonely. And then Bea came into his life.

We all remember vividly the attractive, dark-haired widow who lived across the street. She was in her late 40s – my father was 55 – and her husband, who had died not long before, had been my sister’s pediatrician. We didn’t know their family very well, but Bea was one of the neighbors who brought over casseroles and prepared the house for guests right after my mother’s death as we were sitting shiva – saying prayers to honor the dead. And there in the kitchen, she greeted my father and said, “When you’re ready, come and see me.” We were astonished, or perhaps better, appalled. What kind of hussy was coming into our home after a funeral and intruding on our grief? And worst of all, she was so very different from our mother. But about nine months later, they met at a party, began to see each other, went on a romantic get-away to a Caribbean island, and got married just a couple of months later. And Bea has been the best thing that could have come into my father’s life. I’m just grateful she was willing to speak up. For as I think back, I guess he never outgrew that gawky shyness of his younger years, reflected in the fact that both his wives had to ask him out first. Left to his own devices he might still be a single man.

We all thought they would stay in New Jersey forever, and that was just fine. But a couple of years after they were married, Warren Bennis, then president of the University of Cincinnati, called my father to ask him to come to UC as executive vice president, the same position he held at Rutgers. Why

someone would move laterally was beyond us, but he persuaded Bea to drive out to the Midwest, to see that there was indeed life beyond the Atlantic seaboard. And much to our surprise, they decided to come to Cincinnati. The position did offer some perquisites, which were nice, and paid more money, always a good thing, but most important, I think, was the chance for the two of them to embark upon a new adventure together, in a place that he had once called home.

Then, after agreeing to come to Cincinnati but before actually arriving here, my sister learned that Warren Bennis had announced that he planned to resign at the end of the academic year. Not quite sure what that portended, my father resolved to come anyway. He and Bea reached Cincinnati in the midst of the worst snowstorm in decades, unsure of what might happen next.

He took over, in his quiet, competent way, first as second-in-command, then as acting president, and by all accounts did a superb job. And then the Board of Trustees named him to the permanent position, where he had even more latitude than before to shape UC into a first-rate institution.

Those were good years. My father was fortunate in having an outstanding staff, notably Stanley Troup, who was vice president for the medical school, and Mike Ullman, who in his early 30s became vice president for business affairs. Stan, whom we all knew in the Literary Club, remained a friend even after both retired. Mike left for a prestigious White House fellowship, and later became

CEO first of Macy's, then of J.C. Penney, and stays in touch to this day. Those three, and others, pummeled themselves on the racquetball court regularly, sometimes emerging with bruises they tried to hide when they went to work. Mercifully, my father was no longer worried about that troublesome heart murmur that had compromised his athletic career many years before.

The university thrived under my father's leadership. Warren Bennis had brought this municipal institution into the state system, but now all kinds of new procedures had to be worked out. And with his confident, low-key approach to governance, everything got done. It wasn't always easy working with a Board that on occasion seemed to have a different, even quixotic, sense of academic values. But my father persevered and the university prospered. He always understood when to speak out and when to remain silent, and his approach worked exceedingly well. To this day, whenever my wife and I take my father and Bea out to dinner, we inevitably meet someone who knows them and recalls his tenure at the top in flattering terms.

One of his goals as president was to clean up the athletic teams. Recruiting violations were all too common, and the athletic department was in trouble. My father determined that this pattern should end, whatever the impact on the win-loss column. And the violations stopped, though for a time so too did winning records. One of his proudest moments came when he was interviewed by *Sports Illustrated* for a story on the NCAA. The magazine ran a flattering line

drawing of him, taken from a photograph, and quoted him, much to his delight, as saying that regulation by the NCAA was tantamount to no regulation at all.

As his professional career flourished, his personal life stabilized as well. Bea was wonderful for him, after many years of living with my mother's dread disease. It wasn't easy at the start, for one of her sons was paralyzed with Guillain-Barré syndrome, my 11-month daughter Jenny spent 5 weeks in the hospital with a terrible burn, and my sister imploded emotionally after my mother's death. My father had always prided himself on maintaining a stoic New England balance – a curious kind of self-identification for a nice Jewish boy from the Midwest – but during my sister's hospitalization, he had to let that façade go. He made umpteen trips to the hospital, engaged in one-on-one sessions as well as family sessions, and moved forward as we all did in confronting issues we had never dealt with before. And all of that gave us a grounding as we collectively made a new start.

A few years later, when I was moving from Yale to a tenure-track position at the University of Oregon, I needed to drive the car out West. My father offered to drive with me, and we therefore had five days in the car together. I learned then more than I ever had about his parents, their conflicted marriage, his siblings, and his views about a host of things I had wondered about as I grew up. It was a remarkable time, one to be treasured, and it gave me an even better sense of someone I thought I knew.

When, after seven years as head of UC, my father grew tired of the interminable – even unconscionable – hassles with the Board, he decided to step down, and work as a faculty member in the History Department for two years before finally retiring at the then mandatory age of 70. He had a leave coming, and took Bea to England to do research on a book he had started and abandoned more than 30 years before. It was a good year for them – and for us when we visited – and all too soon it was time to come back home to Cincinnati and start to write.

As most of us in the Literary Club know, writing isn't always easy. Certainly not writing that warrants publication. And it's all the harder if you haven't done it for decades. But my father had a book he wanted to write, and so he plugged away. In due course, it became clear to my sister, a professional journalist, and me that we could probably help. And so, with a sense that this was payback time, we plunged in and became his editors, brandishing our red pencils on his occasionally stuffy and often awkward prose just as he had done with us many years before. After multiple revisions, he had a good manuscript, which he sent to a former student who was now History editor at the University of North Carolina Press, one of the prestigious publishers in the field. The editor sent it out to two referees who recommended publication, and in due course it appeared. It was a lovely piece of work, and it garnered good reviews. Karen and I breathed a sigh of relief. Our job was done.

But not quite yet. My father had another book he wanted to write. And so he plugged away again, and finally gave us the new manuscript. This time he told us outright that he was tired, and didn't really want to do much more work on the manuscript, though he wanted it to appear. That was a cop-out, of course, absolutely impossible we understood as soon as we looked at what he had written. But we persuaded him that he could handle the changes we recommended, and once again, after multiple revisions, he had a draft that found its way into print with another outstanding press. Mercifully, that was the end of the line.

In more recent years, with Jack McDonough and others, he has devoted himself to the Center for the History of the Health Professions, a part of the UC library system and appropriately named after him. Indeed many of you were good enough to attend the formal dedication on campus several years ago.

Now, my father is tired. He's had a long life, a good life, a rich life. He's done pretty much all he ever wanted to do. It's getting harder, even impossible to walk these days. We get out as much as we can – his presence here is a testament to his willingness to give in to my insistence and leave the house. But we all know it's tough.

As I think about this time in our lives, I'm reminded of a course I took in my senior year at Harvard, nearly fifty years ago. It was taught by Erik Erikson, the wonderful psychiatrist who had been himself analyzed by Anna Freud, and it was

called “The Human Life Cycle.” Basically, it was Erikson, now an old man, reflecting on his theories and their impact on how we viewed the process of emotional development. Sigmund Freud had written about the three stages of childhood. Erikson broadened that construct to talk about eight stages, which included adolescence and old age. I remember him having us watch Swedish director Ingemar Bergman’s beautiful film *Wild Strawberries*, about an old man coming to terms with his life, and it was clear that it spoke to Erikson as he was confronting similar issues himself.

Now it’s my father’s turn to look back at the last 95 years. My hope is that this evening we’ve all been able to look back with him before it’s too late. I appreciate your being here with me tonight to share the roses, so we can together enjoy the process. For as we sang at the start: “Give me the roses, while I live, trying to cheer me on. Useless are flowers when you’re dead, after the soul has gone.”