

Friday, September 19th, 2014
St. John Vianney Church
160 Hinesburg Road
South Burlington, VT

Paul E. Dowd, Eulogy

Written by his grandchildren, Sean Paul Lambert and Megan Dowd Lambert
Read by Sean Paul Lambert

Born in Boston on February 15th, 1925, the youngest of eight, Paul E. Dowd, our Papa, was the tops. It's hard to imagine what his childhood must have been like, but snippets would come through in his storytelling and reminiscing, particularly in the last years of his life. He spoke of going to the Boston Public Library, the first library in the country with a children's room, where he would read for hours without knowing he could check out books and bring them home. He would scrounge up the change to go to Fenway Park—"but I probably went more for the ice cream than the game" he'd later confess, while also recalling the terrible sunburns his Irish skin would get from sitting in the bleachers. But when asked what his favorite thing to do was when he was a child, he revealed his Depression-era roots and immediately said, "Eat. Because we didn't always have enough food around."

Certainly, his family didn't have much, but they had just enough to put forth the man, husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather and great-great grandfather he became. Let's add another great to that: He was great, three times over, in so many ways. Whenever I speak of him, and I know I'm not alone in this, I say he was the funniest person I ever knew; from the time I was boy to when I had the pleasure of laughing with him as a man, I treasured his wit and the gentle spirit that felt equally boundless and easy.

Who else but our Papa could convince my sisters and me as kids that the overhead fan spinning above the dining-room table was actually the propeller of a plane that had crashed through the roof? He got my younger sister Keita to believe there was a small elephant living in his moustache, as evidenced by the sound he made when she looked in

close. When she was seven, he signed my older sister Megan's Cabbage Patch doll's adoption paper with the name he'd given himself as a nine-year-old with a sense of humor that would come to define him, *Paul Edward Joseph Bartholomew Vincent Patrick Dowd*.

That witty boy grew into a man who maintained his love of books, and humor, and the Red Sox, and ice cream, and family. His early experiences worrying about food on the table made him determined his own children would never have such concerns. He was New England thrifty, and he worked hard. Following service to his country in WWII, he punched the clock for decades manufacturing batteries, objects that store energy. It's fitting, isn't it? He was a man of great energy, himself. He had to be to raise such a large, loving family, and to do it so well. The law of conservation of energy states that energy can neither be created nor destroyed, but only changed. Papa's energy has not vanished. In fact, not a single bit of him is gone; he's just less *arranged* than what we'd like, and we have to accept that, hard as it may be. Thankfully, we have each other to cherish all Papa gave and all he will continue to give us as we change and remember him well.

In preparation for this eulogy, I talked, emailed and texted with my sister Megan, who contributed a great deal to this and I went through the memory book that his children, my sister, and I contributed to for Mimi and Papa's birthdays a few years back. I bet a lot of you have been looking at that book recently to stay close to Papa as you we say goodbye. What a tribute this book is to him, and to Mimi, as well. As I reflect, especially, on my mother's, my aunts' and uncle's contributions and think about you enduring the loss of your beloved father, I am moved by how much I see of Papa living on in all of you:

His sense of humor and his easy laugh are strongly apparent to me in Uncle Ern and Aunt Ellen.

His sense of duty to family shines through in Aunt Paula and Aunt Pam.

His outgoing, generous sociability is apparent in my own mother, Linda, and Aunt Susan; both excellent story-tellers, too

His love of nature is at the center of Uncle Ern's life, and Aunt Susan's, as well as in Aunt Celeste's whose affection for all things canine is definitely related to Papa's love of nature.

And all of you, each and every one of his seven children, unquestionably inherited his hard work ethic.

But, Papa was not all work and no play. I hadn't put together until I wrote this that Papa was actually his own brand of working class surrealist who loved near absurdist humor above all else and who said that "the most important things in life are laughter and good conversation." He would laugh until tears rolled down his face, whether it was because his daughter Linda got pulled over by an overzealous police officer for littering when a "free floating tissue" flew out of the car window, or when recalling how his brother Al came home covered in blue dye from working in a balloon factory, or when telling us how as a boy he thought God's name was Harold, as in "Harold be thy name," and so he'd always make the sign of the cross when a neighbor named Harold walked by. "What're you doing that for Paul?" his mother asked her young son in her Irish brogue. "It's Harold!" he explained and referenced the Lord's Prayer. "Oh how she laughed," Papa said, laughing himself with the memory. Aunt Susan told me of a time when she was a little girl berry picking with her parents and all of the sudden he grabbed her hand and said, "Run! It's a bear!" and they ran only to look back and see Mimi rounding the corner. And, oh how they all laughed, and we're laughing still

Amid all of these memories, Papa wasn't a sentimental man, not one for what he called "all that mushy stuff." But he loved us all deeply. He made things for his family, or invited a few lucky ones to do some woodworking alongside him. "You and I, we mostly made a lot of sawdust," he'd say to me of our basement projects at 3 Bradford Place. He tried to always do right by his family, to help create memories through quality time spent with puzzles, games, walks, and above all, laughter and conversation. Aunt Ellen and her family have a treasure trove of memories stored up from the 24 years they lived together, and I know all of the Dowds also have memories and stories about this wonderful man. And now in our grief, all I can do, all *we* can do, is honor him by passing on to others a bit of the love and laughter he left each of us with. What greater gesture could there be?

For my part, my siblings and I, and undoubtedly all of his grandchildren, recall how very playful he was—playing ring-around-

the-rosie with stuffed animals included in the ring, hugging us tight and saying "I'm gonna squeeze all the tomata juice outa you!", or indulging my older sister when as a little girl leaving his house after a visit she'd run to him and whisper, "Say please don't go Megan! Say please don't go!" And he'd smile and then wail piteously while hugging her and saying "Please don't go Megan! Please don't go!"

We may want to say the same to him right now, "Please don't go Papa. Please don't go." But as hard as it may be to believe or accept, we know in our hearts that it was his time to go, and that he left us gently and peacefully and on his own terms since Aunt Paula and Larry opened their home to him, and Aunt Pam and Dave did all they could to be present in Florida, and my mother Linda gave him the loving care he deserved right until the end, and Uncle Ern, Aunt Ellen, Aunt Susan, and Aunt Celeste and their families all stayed in touch from New England with phone calls, gifts, and also with visits made within the last six weeks of his life. And I know that my siblings, cousins, nieces, nephews, and I did everything we could to keep Mimi and Papa in our hearts and to visit, call, and send letters, too. Over the past four year, between the two of us. Megan and nearly daily postcards "It makes us feel we're not forgotten," Papa told her. That's one thing he needn't worry about. None of us will ever forget him.

And behind, within, and throughout all of this familial love, Mimi, his wife of 64 years, stood by him with a love that was steadfast and true, witnessing his last breaths with my mother beside her. He knew how well he was loved, by all of us, and so instead of saying, "Please don't go," we can say, "It's ok to go now. It's ok to go."

Papa will be in our memories and in our hearts, and in all he taught us. A few days before he died, when my mother asked him, after 89 and a half years, what did he know for sure, he said, "What do I know for sure, certain?" "Yes, what do you know for sure, certain?" she said. After he was quiet for awhile and my mother prompted him again, he left us all a lesson of loving the simple pleasures, the small moments governed by the passing seasons and a sense of peace in nature, "I know I love apple picking," he said, "and blueberry picking, and strawberry picking, but apple picking is my favorite."

Papa's favorite poet, Robert Frost, whom Mimi read aloud to him in the days and hours before he died, shared this love and wrote about it, too. I will close with a few words from his poem, After Apple-picking.

After Apple-picking (excerpt)

- By Robert Frost

And I keep hearing from the cellar bin
The rumbling sound
Of load on load of apples coming in.
For I have had too much
Of apple-picking: I am overtired
Of the great harvest I myself desired.
There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,
Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall.
For all
That struck the earth,
No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,
Went surely to the cider-apple heap
As of no worth.
One can see what will trouble
This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.
Were he not gone,
The woodchuck could say whether it's like his
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
Or just some human sleep.

Thank you to my Dowd family for inviting me to deliver this eulogy. Doing so has been one of the greatest honors of my life. Papa was a personal hero of mine and I truly enjoyed every opportunity I had to spend with him. I didn't just love the guy, I really liked him. I hope you all feel I've done Papa proud, and that I've honored all of the love you had for him, and he for you. I expect more laughter and conversation (not to mention some tasty apple pie) as we gather to remember Papa following the service and in the days and years to come. Thank you. I love you all.

****Below is After Apple-picking in its entirety

After Apple-picking

My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree
Toward heaven still,
And there's a barrel that I didn't fill
Beside it, and there may be two or three
Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.
But I am done with apple-picking now.
Essence of winter sleep is on the night,
The scent of apples: I am drowsing off.
I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight
I got from looking through a pane of glass
I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough
And held against the world of hoary grass.
It melted, and I let it fall and break.
But I was well
Upon my way to sleep before it fell,
And I could tell
What form my dreaming was about to take.
Magnified apples appear and disappear,
Stem end and blossom end,
And every fleck of russet showing clear.
My instep arch not only keeps the ache,
It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.
I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.
And I keep hearing from the cellar bin
The rumbling sound
Of load on load of apples coming in.
For I have had too much
Of apple-picking: I am overtired
Of the great harvest I myself desired.
There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,
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