

Henry Clay Hoffman Jr. Eulogy

Our family would like to thank all of you for coming today, as we honor the life of our Dad, Henry Clay Hoffman Jr. Two of his best friends from his youth, Huck and Leo, are here as his honorary pallbearers. Proof of their friendship, is that Dad stood as best man for each of them, at their weddings. Dad was known by many names including Honey, Dad, Pop-Pop, Granddad, and Mr. H to his immediate family, Harry or Uncle Harry to other relatives and close friends, and Henry or Mr. Hoffman to his co-workers.

Someone once said, "It's not the years in your life, it's the life in your years!" Dad did well on both scores, living a full life in his 87 plus years. He traveled widely for work and for pleasure, often combining both into the same trip. He had been to dozens of countries, on all seven continents, and to all but one of the states, North Dakota! He was chipper and full of vitality right up until the end. He made few if any concessions to age. He was still doing almost everything that he had done years earlier, including consulting on satellites, dating, driving everywhere.... in fact got a speeding ticket.... perhaps not his first.... just one week before going into the hospital! As a matter of fact, when Shannon and I were visiting Dad in the hospital, I told her, that everyone knew that Granddad had taught Uncle Clay, Aunt Jan, and me how to drive. She asked me why, and I said because we all tend to have a heavy foot. She looked at Dad, and asked, "Do you speed Granddad?" He replied, with a little smirk on his face, "NO, I wouldn't do that!"

Dad was born on December 4, 1925, the only son and first child of Henry Clay Hoffman Sr. and Cecelia Hoffman. The Hoffman's moved from Baltimore City, way out into the country, on Old Frederick Road in Catonsville, into a new home in 1928. Thus, began his 85 years as a member of St. Agnes Parish. A few years later, his only sibling, Mary Frances, was born.

Dad attended St. Agnes Grade School and then Mt. St. Joe High School. He always liked to tell the story about how he never graduated from St. Agnes, and it took him seven years to get through Mt. St. Joe; waiting for someone to inquire as to why! The answer, his father gave was, "If the nuns at St. Agnes can't handle you, the brothers at Mt. St. Joe will!" So, he attended grades 1-5 at St. Agnes and grades 6-12 at Mt. St. Joe, from where he graduated in 1943.

Dad knew how to charm the ladies. He wooed and won the heart of Mom, known as Ann O'Leary, having met her at the St. Agnes carnival in the summer of 1949. Dad and Mom were married on April 14, 1952. They were married for forty one years. For the first two years of their marriage, they lived in the home of Dad's parents, where he had lived since he was two. During this time they saved money to build their own house, on the lot next door to his parents! Dad and Mom moved into their new home in 1954. They were blessed with three children; Clay, Cindy, and Jan. Mom passed away almost twenty years ago in 1993. Dad lived in the house for 59 years, until he took sick a few weeks ago.

After a time, Dad connected with a friend, Marcia, and they married in 1996. Marcia and Dad were married almost five years, until Marcia passed away in 2001. Over the past four years Dad was courting Carmie Peavler, who was the light of his life! Like clockwork every evening Dad would call Carmie on his cell phone, but being the frugal guy that he was, he would wait until after nine, when he would not be using any peak minutes.

Whenever someone would ask him how tall he was, he would say "I'm 5 feet 5.... and a half", wanting that last half inch duly noted! Although he may have been short in stature, he was a giant in terms of what he accomplished during his long career. Dad had an amazing work career, but always found time to devote himself to his family. He was a true rocket scientist, working almost all of his life doing what he loved best.

He was in the Navy during World War II, from May 1944 until June 1946. He was an Electronic Technician's Mate at a time when even the word radar was classified. Following his service to our country, he graduated with a BS in Electrical Engineering from Johns Hopkins University in 1949 and a MS in Electrical Engineering from the University of Maryland in 1952.

From 1950 to 1962, he worked at the Naval Ordinance Lab where he developed and evaluated guidance systems for new weapons. In 1962, Dad became head of the new Guidance and Control Branch at Goddard Space Flight Center. His team developed the high-tech hardware to keep NASA's growing fleet of scientific spacecraft oriented accurately, with respect to the Earth, the Moon, the Sun, and the Stars. Dad had a front-row seat to the dawn of the NASA satellite era, and worked on many pioneering spacecraft.

But it was when things went terribly wrong in orbit that Dad's true genius in engineering shined the brightest. When satellites started to mysteriously rock back and forth in orbit like drunken sailors or wander off course, Dad helped figure out what was wrong and found a way to get the priceless birds back on track. He and his team came up with ingenious ways to keep aging satellites pointed in the right direction and collecting data despite their problems.

He gained a reputation in his field as the Mr. Fixit for wayward satellites and spacecraft, and was written up several times in the popular press as the "Satellite Doctor" and the "Satellite Savior." He garnered many awards from Goddard, was credited with a number of inventions in guidance and control electronics, and held six U.S. patents.

Dad believed strongly in family. He wrote an annual Christmas letter, keeping everyone abreast of how our family was doing. He was always proud of our family's accomplishments! There is nothing he wouldn't and didn't do for us. Dad was best man at both of Clay's weddings and Dad honored Clay by having him as best man for his second wedding, obviously Clay wasn't around for his first wedding. Dad encouraged all of us to pursue our dreams. He pushed us to allow us to reach our full potential!

Dad could take apart and fix any appliance, and sometimes made the appliance work better than it did originally. As a testament to his ability to keeping appliances working, Dad still had a nearly 50 year old dryer, which he worked on, a few days before going into the hospital. Dad also enjoyed working on his cars. Once his vintage Mustang escaped the garage in reverse, when he was working under the hood, only to be stopped by the pear tree in the yard.

When we were kids growing up, we were not allowed to feed our dog Senji at the table or even allow her to come near the table, when we were eating. But all of the grandkids can tell you, that he broke this rule often, when visiting our homes, and he would secretly feed our dogs under the table, and then act like he did not do it.

Dad always had a friendly greeting for everyone, usually a "How-do, How-do", and was known for telling jokes, sometimes a bit off-color. Dad was also a snazzy dresser. He was famous for his plaid and red sports jackets, his holiday and argyle socks, and "interesting" ties.

He was the consummate host at parties at the house. He was a superb bartender at family gatherings and able to make a Brandy Alexander, Grasshopper, White Russian, or anything at all... And he enjoyed his wine, though only a few glasses at a time. Good food, good drink, and entertaining family and friends, these were things Dad excelled at.

He loved to talk about his work with his family. Cole remembers hearing all about space, the big-bang theory, and satellites. We also heard many tales of exotic travels and meals, including the infamous chocolate covered ants....

apparently they are a bit salty. There were many memorable family dinners, and Pop-Pop usually fell asleep on the couch afterwards, along with Clay.

Summing it up, Dad was a special man! One person quoted that he was a National Treasure. He looked up towards the Heavens.... seeing the stars and celestial bodies in outer space, like few did. He always knew what he wanted to do in life, and he loved every minute of rescuing all those satellites! On Tuesday night of last week, a rare event occurred, when three of the planets were in special alignment. God chose that very night to call the Satellite Doctor home.

Rest in Peace, Dad! I sure hope you trained your replacements well. The Earth could use a few good Satellite Doctors like you, but you will always be the "Original Satellite Doctor!"