

PAMPHLET 58

SCOOP

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Scoop lives at the Minnesota Masonic Home in Bloomington, Minnesota. He is 87 ½ years old, his hands shake, he uses a wheel chair, and he doesn't hear well. He also has a sharp mind and clear and curious brown eyes. He stays engaged with the world around him through books, television, and newspapers. Right now he is busy learning to send and receive email on his MailStation machine. He types with the eraser end of a pencil. The administrator of the Masonic Home talked to him recently and wants to publish one of the three manuscripts Scoop wrote in the last several years.

Scoop dresses neatly every day and charms his guests with nursing home jokes and quick compliments. His room is organized and interesting. Photos of kids, grandchildren, and great grandchildren line the walls along with a son's photos of Africa. He has his books, tapes, radio, and remote controls near his motorized recliner. Six feet tall and 200 pounds, his grip is firm. Harriet, his wife of 63 years, died two years ago (May 9, 2000). Harriet died a slow and difficult death and it was a hard time. I got to know Scoop then.

Scoop spent 28 some years in St. Cloud, Minnesota as the circulation district manager for the Minneapolis Star Tribune newspaper before he and Harriet moved to Minneapolis when he was promoted. He believes in doing his best, and he worked hard to serve the newspaper's customers and the young people he supervised. Newspaper circulation work is demanding. A new product is distributed daily (in those days two products a day were delivered) and it is a daily challenge to keep the distribution network together and to serve thousands of customers. He was away from his family many early mornings, weekends, and evenings as he worked to provide for his four children and help others in need—customers and newspaper carriers. After a 42 year career with the newspaper, Scoop and Harriet moved to Fountain Hills, Arizona for a 15 year retirement before moving to the Masonic Home in 1991.

He believes in service and often said he gained his college education through his involvement in the community. He led most groups in St.

Cloud including the high school PTA, city council, church council, junior and senior chamber of commerce, and the local Chicago Cubs minor league baseball team. This work took him away from his family often. His kids loved their dad and wished he was home more. But he attended almost all of his children's school activities and events, and he was there for them when they needed him.

Scoop taught his children to be responsible. One of his sons was especially free-spirited and got into a fair amount of trouble in high-school. Once, on a beautiful spring day, the 16 year-old decided to skip school with a friend. At noon they walked down a street far from home on their way to meet friends for lunch at a gas station. Scoop drove by, stopped, and directed his son into the car. The high school sophomore said, "We can go home and you can write me an excuse, and I can go back to school after lunch." Scoop said, "No, you will go to the principal's office right now." He knew his son would be marked down one grade in each class he missed. The young man never skipped school again and rarely missed a college class. Scoop was, as he liked to say, fair but firm.

When his son was cut from the basketball team, for violations of team rules, the night before the district tournament began, Scoop, who loves sports and felt proud of his son, was deeply disappointed. He said, "Our family will go to the game together." And they did. His son learned to face his mistakes head on. Scoop never hit, he never yelled, he never played games as he held this son accountable and made him be responsible for his behavior. He refused to enable anyone to behave in destructive or irresponsible ways. Many years later his son would be in trouble with alcohol. Scoop again told him the truth, arranged for treatment, and, perhaps, saved his life. Scoop wasn't always appreciated for his courage and commitment to do the right thing. I know his son and those lessons have served him and his free-spirit well in his life.

Scoop is an independent man. He learned his independence as a child who grew up in a large family during the depression. He paid his bills on time, worked for what he got in life, lived on his own from a young age, and handled his own problems in life. He sticks by his kids always but doesn't overindulge them or do their growing up for them, because he knows they have to learn to handle life for themselves. He stays connected to his children but lets them live their own lives, as he lives his own life, and does not meddle or use them to meet his own needs. His adult children struggled at times, as most do, and he remained calm and steady. He suffered for them and bore the pain his children brought him privately. As his children went through life he was always there for them, even when he did not agree with their choices and even when they disappointed him.

Scoop is resilient. He learned his resilience as a young polio victim who spent three summers at the Shriners hospital in Minneapolis, Minnesota. His mother took him to the hospital, left him (she had a house full of kids back home to take care of), and he spent months alone. He learned to handle life's difficulties on his own. He keeps his feelings to himself, handles his losses by himself, and has a can-do attitude about life. He especially does not want to burden his children with his difficult feelings and problems.

Scoop and his wife Harriet came from German and Scandinavian families and lived lives of moderation. They were private and faced life's challenges with determination. They did not show their emotions to others, they did not complain, and their kids never saw anger expressed in front of them. Considerate and thoughtful, they had scores of friends everywhere they lived. Never hugged as a child, Scoop was not demonstrative emotionally. I am sure he would have liked more emotional connection with his parents. I am sure his children would have liked more with him-- and their children with them.

Harriet began to move toward death in January of 2000. Arthritis hurt her terribly, she had great difficulty walking, and her memory and ability to think began to deteriorate. She could no longer do the things she loved to do. Scoop was with her each and every moment and adapted his life and routines as she deteriorated. I believe Harriet decided, at a deep level, to die to this world and did the only thing she could to bring the end about— she quit eating.

The medical community tried to fix her, the family, of course, tried to fix her, and Harriet, in her quiet and dignified way, just did what she wanted. She could never tell anyone she wanted to die; she probably could not acknowledge her wishes to herself consciously. That's my theory; I might be wrong. Finally, after many months, everyone agreed to make Harriet comfortable and allow nature to take its course. Family gathered around her for weeks and sat with her, read to her, and talked to her.

Scoop is my dad and Harriet was my mother. I sat many days and held her hand. I wished I knew this quiet woman better. A loving, gracious, and beautiful woman, she always deferred to Scoop and kept her thoughts to herself. I just accepted the context of our relationship as life went by. As I sat with her I regretted not working harder to know her better and deeper. As she lost weight, her appearance changed. I saw only her wonderful soul. Near the end many of us encouraged her to let go. Her work was done. Dad would be fine. We would be okay. She could move on through death's door. And finally she did.

I spent much time with Scoop during mom's final months, during the

funeral process, and in the months after. I watched dad's heart break as he gradually accepted that his wife would die. I watched him struggle with feeling helpless and out of control. I saw his agony on her last day. He could not bear to see Harriet labor so hard with life. He directed the funeral plans. The obituary appeared in the newspaper as he wrote it. The minister read the notes about Harriet's life as dad wrote them. He made all the arrangements. He could handle things if he stayed busy and controlled what he could control.

We buried mom the day after the funeral service. The May morning was cold, rainy, and windy. I shivered and joined dad in the car to keep warm. He was shaken. Tears welled in our eyes. We were to say goodbye to wife and mother in a few moments. My heart swelled with love for my dad. I knew then how much he loved my mother, how much he loved me, and, at that moment, in my 54th year and in his 85th year, our hearts connected. I told him how proud I was of him for how he had handled things. I told him I loved him. He choked out, "I love you too." My mother, who loved her family, would have been happy.

I watched Scoop adapt and go on with life. He moved to a new room, he began new projects, he got up and dressed up each day, and he traveled to visit children in California and Maryland. I went to live in Colorado, and we talked weekly. He clipped articles from the newspaper and sent them to me.

I live a few hours away now and visit when I am in Minneapolis. I call him weekly and we exchange emails. Expressing emotions is still hard for dad, but he is more open than ever before. I know he is lonely. He misses mom and isn't afraid to cry when he talks about her.

I feel close to my dad. I like that. I know he loves me. I know he is proud of me. I can read it in his eyes and hear it in his voice. I am grateful for what we have today. I understand the context of his life. I see what he gave me in my life, and I love him for that. He provided, he protected, and he modeled the values that have served me well in life. That is how he loved. Scoop is a good person, a loving father, and a kind man—he always was all of those things

I like to think about my dad and my life with him now that I have lived a life of my own, made my own mistakes, had my own successes, struggled with my own children, and am slightly less self-absorbed than in my younger, more self-righteous years. My vision of what could be is clearer, my understanding of how we are formed deeper, and my heart is more compassionate for imperfection than in younger years. I have a better idea of what love is and I am better able to carry my share of the relationship responsibility that grown up children must assume if they are to mature as

people.

My dad was not perfect—no parents are and no children are. He was not a mind-reader—we need to ask for what we need and express our hearts to those we love. He had his own challenges in life. He met life head on and overcame himself, the physical handicaps of polio, and life's trials. Today dad thinks about and prepares for his own death. He doesn't want to be a burden to anyone. Everything is taken care of. Recently he asked me if I would write his obituary for him. I felt moved and sad. I don't want him to leave just yet.

I've had more material things in my life than dad had in his. I've had more career experiences and more formal education. But, deep down, I know that this everyday hero is a better human being than I am. He remains my model for living and a beacon for who I can become.