

# Eulogy for Fred Gressard

September 10, 2011

1. When Arnold Palmer walked down the 18th fairway at his last Masters Tournament, he started to cry. In the press conference after his round the press asked him to explain his tears. Arnold said, "Since I've got older I have become an old sop. I cry at everything." (Paraphrase of his comments)
2. Ruth and I have become old sops....we watch a McDonald's commercial and see a grandfather hugging his grandson... and we look at each other and we both have tears in our eyes.
3. I didn't get the Palmer gene for golf, but I did get his soppiness gene. I hope I can get through this.
4. The College of Medicine (where I worked) has a wonderful custom that they have instituted. Each year after the anatomy class has been completed, the class writes an original service honoring those who have donated their bodies to the college and for the family members. The service consists of poems, songs and stories written by the students...and is always a wonderful experience for everyone involved. Following the service, all who able walk to the Rootstown Cemetery for a burial service. One year, a group of three medical students sang an original three part harmony song about life and love and death...which was very beautiful. When I got home I told Ruth that if I were to

die in the next few years she should have the group sing at my service. The next day, I saw XXXXX in the hall and he asked what I thought of their song the previous day. I told him about telling Ruth how great they were and that she should have them sing at my service if something was to happen to me while they were still in school. He smiled and said, "We would love to sing at your funeral."

5. Well, I don't love doing a eulogy for Fred, but am honored to have been asked.

Actually, some years ago Fred asked me if I would do his eulogy...I said I would if I was still around and if I was asked.

He said, "I'm asking you."

I said, "You won't be in charge when that day comes."

He said, "Wait and see!" Fred got the last word.

6. When I mentioned to Fred I was embarrassed that I choked up so many times when I was giving the eulogy for Bob Green, Fred said, in his straight forward, and wise, way... "Don't worry about it....It just shows you care." I cared a lot about Fred and would like to tell you several stories about him and them...The only subject he loved more than the Navy, golf, cars and flying....was the love of his life...Betty.

7. My favorite story about Fred...Fred and Betty got married in the almost new Twin Lakes Country Club on June 24, 1941. Betty's father loaned them his new 1942 Buick Super Convertible for their honeymoon and they drove to Deerfield Village (Dearborn, MI). After several days they

returned to Cleveland on the **SeeandBee**, a 29 year old, 500 foot, coal-fed side-wheeler ferry.

The next time Fred saw the **SeeandBee**, several years later...she had been outfitted as an aircraft carrier (renamed **The USS Wolverine, IX-64**) and he made his solo fighter plane landing on her as she sailed in Lake Michigan. Did Fred land on a ferry, or did he and Betty have their honeymoon on a Man of War?

When I retired, Fred invited me to join his golf group. The group members were: Dr. Dumm, Dr. Voorhees, Dr. Webb, Dr. Laing and Fred. I had a great admiration for each of these men...some of the greatest guys from the greatest generation. Dr. Voorhees told about giving the first penicillin shots on New Guinea and how it changed wartime medicine; Dr. Dumm told about making Time magazine when he threw pennies onto the stage in Kent Hall to protest what his minister said was the "obscene belly dancers" performing there; and one day, this formal man laid down on the eighteenth green at the Youngstown Country Club to demonstrate how to do back exercises.

Dr. Lang told about the origin of his wild neckties and of being recalled to active duty during the Korean War; Dr. Webb talked about losing a child, and told us about midnight surgeries and how scary some of them were. Fred talked about the Navy. I learned a little about golf playing with these titans, but much more about life....and what it means to be a solid person. Can any of you think

of any better role models? My friends might not believe this, but I rarely told any stories to these men, as theirs were always better.

A life changing event for Fred was his participation in the Battle of Guadalcanal (November 1942). Thirteen American ships entered the area and were ambushed by the Japanese navy. The first 12 ships in the convoy were heavily damaged and several were sunk. Fred's ship, the USS Fletcher (DD445), was the thirteenth ship and was undamaged...and it became known as The Lucky 13.

Fred was decorated for helping rescue many sailors during that battle, but was greatly saddened by seeing the ship his academy roommate was on torpedoed, blown up and sunk...with only a few hundred being saved. Thirty years later Fred saw the roommate he thought had been killed at an airport out west. This friend told Fred that he had missed reporting to the ship and had so much survivor guilt about being alive that it ruined his life....and that he had just disappeared. Fred talked about that a lot...and how war does such strange things to folks. It changed Fred too...but in positive ways...it made him more compassionate and gave him a broader perspective, he said.

8. During the last fifteen years, Ruth and I became very close to Betty and Fred. Probably not as close as the one they had with the Wrights...Betty still takes credit for the successes of Rebekah and Rachel. We admired Betty and Fred and shared meals with them several times

each week. They became honorary grandparents to our children and grandchildren...and Jill still talks about playing frizzby with Grandpa Fred on the beach at the Pensacola Naval Air Station. We liked them so much that I wrote a story about them entitled, "When we grow up, Ruth and I want to be like Betty and Fred."....They traveled, they loved their family, they helped others, they had fun together, they loved each other...and, we still want to be like them.

9. As successful as Fred was, he never got to fulfill one of his life-long goals...shooting his age in golf. He came close many times and would not go to an easier course than Twin Lakes, because he said "shooting his age on an easier course wouldn't count." So I think I know how this whole story is working out...Each day now Fred is:

- Reading a chapter of the Naval Institute Proceedings and a Car or Airplane magazine;
- Writing Betty a love letter; and,
- Driving the fanciest car St. Peter will allow, to the toughest golf course in heaven, .... and shooting his age, or better, every time he plays.

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