

Eulogy for My Father*

Bennett Jacobstein**

¶1 The story of a person's life consists not only of major events and accomplishments but also of the qualities and characteristics that make him or her unique. My initial instinct was to end the last sentence with the words "very unique," but I can still hear my father's voice in my head saying "There is no such thing as *very* unique."

¶2 I would like to share with you the history of my father's life, including some of the personal stories that illustrate his innate caring, kindness, gentle nature, and humor.

¶3 My father was born in 1920 in Detroit, Michigan. He was the youngest of three brothers. He also had a sister, Ruth, who died tragically at the age of four before he was born. He was known to his family as Myron. In fact his legal name was Joseph Meyer Jacobstein. Later in life his official name became J. Myron Jacobstein, but his friends called him Mike. I often tried to get an explanation for this but none was ever given.

¶4 My paternal grandfather became wealthy in the real estate field. He was truly ahead of his time, however, and lost it all in 1927, two years before the Depression. During my father's childhood the family ran a used tire store in Detroit to try to make ends meet.

¶5 My father's oldest brother was Ray—his elder by eight years. His other brother, Harold, was only three years older than my father and therefore they spent more time together as children. Family outings to Belle Isle on hot summer days were among his fondest childhood memories.

¶6 My father was three years into his college education at Wayne State University when the bombing of Pearl Harbor occurred. He enrolled in the Army Air Corp. He was stationed for three year in Hobbs, New Mexico, and worked as a radio operator on Link trainers. These were not the happiest years of his life. To give you some idea of life in Hobbs, New Mexico, soldiers on leave went to Lubbock, Texas, for excitement. When I was growing up, my father would share the same story with us every Thanksgiving. On Thanksgiving Day of 1943, the mess hall arranged to have a full turkey dinner with all the trimmings. My father was on duty and arrived at the mess hall at the end of the meal. The soldier in front of him was given the last piece of turkey. After he had waited five minutes for refills, they came out with a pan of hot dogs.

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¶7 My father's mother passed away in 1945 and his father passed away the next year. From 1946 to 1949, he shared an apartment with his older brother Ray (Harold was already married during this time). Ray did all the cooking for the two bachelors. My father always joked that he wanted to find a wife who could cook like his brother. In the summer of 1949, my father took a two-week vacation at a resort in the Adirondacks. It was there that he met his future wife Belle and became engaged by the end of this vacation. It was a long time before my parents told my sister and me the true story of how they met and became engaged after knowing each other only two weeks. However, their marriage of fifty-five years seems to have worked out very well.

¶8 After getting married, my father attended library school at Columbia University in New York. My parents then moved to Chicago where my sister Ellen was born and, according to my parents, she spent the next five years of her life never sleeping. My father began his career as a law librarian at the University of Chicago while attending law school at night. After he completed law school, the family moved to Champaign, Illinois. It is here that my mother says she went to the only two football games of her life: her first and her last. They remained in Illinois for several years and then went back to New York where I was born—apparently on a snowy day with very few hospital parking spaces available.

¶9 After four years in New York, the family moved to Boulder, Colorado, where my father first held the position of a head law librarian, at the University of Colorado. My earliest memories are of taking walks with him in the snow.

¶10 In 1963, the family made its final move, to Stanford, where my father remained the director of the Stanford Law Library until his retirement in 1987. Fortunately, my parents were able to travel some after his retirement before my mother's illness. He especially enjoyed a trip they took to Scandinavia. When in Stockholm, he observed that there were even more Volvos than in Piedmont, California.

¶11 My friends know that I am a big fan of Stanford University football and basketball. From the age of six years, I attended games with my father. These were very special times for us since my mother and sister could not care less about either sport. Once in every generation Stanford seems to make it to the Rose Bowl. I will always treasure the trip we took to the 1971 Rose Bowl when Stanford upset number one ranked Ohio State University. Stanford went to the Rose Bowl again in the year 2000 but by then my father was too ill to go. I was able to go with my nephew Brian and carry on the family tradition (my daughter Aviva also thinks football is, in her words, "stupid").

¶12 My father's career was a major part of his life. He was active in professional associations and served as president of the American Association of Law Libraries. He also wrote numerous articles and books in the fields of legal research and law librarianship. But more important, he is remembered not only for his professional work but for his kindness, mentoring, and the humor he offered to his colleagues.

¶13 I would like to quote from a 1999 *Law Library Journal* article by Joan Howland. She writes of her encounter with my father while she was working as an acquisitions assistant in the Stanford Law Library while attending library school.

My first clear memory of Professor Jacobstein was one afternoon when I was pushing a loaded book truck down the ramp near his office in the original Stanford Law School building. Never very good at physics, I misjudged the speed at which I could descend the steep grade with a heavily weighted cart. I quickly lost control of the book truck, and it flipped over, with a great deal of racket, in front of Professor Jacobstein's office door. As I stood paralyzed, hoping that the linoleum floor would swallow me up, Professor Jacobstein emerged from his office, surveyed the scene, and with his dry humor said, "I certainly hope you are doing well in library school. You have absolutely no future in your current line of work."¹

She later writes:

Professor Jacobstein has been a powerful influence in the lives of several talented and renowned law librarians, including Robert Berring, Kathleen Price, and George Grossman—who all showed great promise early on in their careers. I am certain I showed no such promise. In fact, I have no idea why [Professor] Jacobstein took a special interest in me, except that, perhaps, after the book truck incident he may have realized that manual labor was not my forte. In any event, I was very fortunate that Professor Jacobstein, an incredible man with an incredible mind, took notice of me and pushed me to reach my maximum potential. Because of him, I have had opportunities and experiences beyond my wildest expectations. All that I have achieved I owe to J. Myron Jacobstein—he is not just my mentor, he is my inspiration.²

¶14 Finally, I would like to quote from a letter I found that my father wrote to his parents during the war. It's a bit of a challenge to do so—his secretary once said that the only thing harder to read than his handwriting was his typing.

June 30, 1944

Dear Folks,

Just a line to let you know I'm all right and that everything is fine with me and you don't have to worry. Tomorrow is Saturday and I have to clean up tonight for tomorrow morning's inspection. I am barracks chief and have to see that the whole barracks is ready.

I hope you are both still feeling all right.

I made a bet with a friend of mine several months ago. He said that the war with Germany would be over July 1, and I said it would not. So Sunday we are going into town, and he is going to buy me a steak dinner. I wish I had lost the bet, though.

Well, there isn't much more to write now.

Your loving son, Myron

1. Joan S. Howland, *J. Myron Jacobstein: More Than a Mentor*, 91 *LAW LIBR. J.* 220, 222 (1999).

2. *Id.* at 227.

¶15 He then went from being a loving son, to being a loving husband, father, and eventually grandfather. My sister and I were blessed to have a loving, caring father who was always there for us, always encouraging us, and accepting us for who we were. My mother was blessed with a wonderful husband who would do anything in the world for her and did. My mother was ill with Parkinson's for many years. My father suffered from dementia in his later years. But even in his state of confusion he would always ask who was taking care of Mom. On the day that he died, I visited my father for what would be the last time. He was lying in his bed snoring away (something my wife and daughter say I inherited from him, although personally I don't believe them). The last thing I said to him was "Don't worry. Everyone will take care of Mom. You can relax now." He passed away peacefully later that afternoon.