
Thomas Joseph Whelan, Jr. MD

A Remembrance

By Sharon Whelan Weiss MD
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When I was eight years old, my favorite television series was about a Scandinavian immigrant family making their way in America. Their lives were a series of challenges made all the more difficult by their lack of financial resources. But they were told by their parents that there was a cache of money hidden in the house that they could tap if needed. Each week I marveled at how they drew on each other's strength and ingenuity and never used the hidden money. Only later did I realize there had never been any hidden money, but their wealth had been each other. So it was with our family. It was our strong sense of family, largely derived from my father which became the fabric on which life's early lessons and values were embroidered: love, loyalty, honesty, and fair play. He insisted on obedience to him and respect toward my Mother, who was never referred to as "She" but always as "Mother." His rules were tough and by today's standards even prudish—no lipstick until one's 16th birthday, and no red nailpolish—never. Bad language was unthinkable. When we complained as adults that he had been too strict a parent, he enjoyed telling us that was why we had turned out so well. Above all, Dad taught us to laugh. We laughed at life's incongruities. We laughed at ourselves. We even laughed at Dad. Returning home after an all night ordeal with a very sick patient, he thrilled us with the story of how he resuscitated his patient by banging on his chest until one of us interrupted, "What's so special about that, that's how you fix everything around the house."

My father placed a high value on education. His parents had worked hard to send him to Andover and Yale University. He repaid them with this exceptional performances both in the classroom and the playing field. In turn he encouraged each of us to realize our full potential. He always insisted that gender was no barrier to achievement. As a young girl I grew up believing that I could do anything I wanted to but he did caution me that I could not have both the rights of men and the privileges of women. I must decide which. What a wonderful first mentor! He displayed largesse toward me at the time of college applications. I had a deal with my father that I would attend the college which gave me the largest scholarship. On acceptance day I received an acceptance letter from my first choice college, Wellesley, but without the badly needed scholarship. A second acceptance letter arrived from the University of Chicago with a generous stipend. With a heavy heart I showed Dad the letters. To my great surprise he gathered me into his arms and said, "Any daughter of mine who gets into Wellesley will go to Wellesley College." And so I did.

Although well-educated in traditional ways, Dad possessed an even more amazing wisdom about people. With his extroverted personality he knew instinctively how to bring out the best in people. His approach to solving a problem was to try to understand and

empathize with the person. Administrators have a fancy word for this now, "non positional negotiation." Dad thought it simply the decent thing to do—it was, to use the Yiddish expression, being a "Mensch." He could predict outcomes by simply understanding the nature of the people involved. After caring for General Douglas MacArthur during his terminal illness he delivered a brilliant analysis at a medical meeting of how this great man's personality and idiosyncrasies had figured so prominently in his illness. Long after I left home Dad continued to be my best resource for advice on any number of professional issues that might arise, although his advice was often couched in athletic terms. Complaining to Dad that there were colleagues who didn't seem to know what was going on he would say, "There's always someone in left field." Encouragement might come in the form of "Hit that ball!" If you abdicated responsibility or quit too soon, he would say, "So, it's coach take me out, is it?" Hassles with administrators would lead to one of his all-time favorite phrases, "Don't mess with the Indians, go to the Chief." He was pleasantly surprised one day when I gave him some advice and told him to do the "full court press." Thinking that somewhere along the way his eldest daughter had finally learned something about sports, he was flabbergasted to find out that my understanding of the term had something to do with having one's clothes well pressed when one made official appearances. My father had so many friends and grateful patients. Under the Christmas tree each year would be a bounty of gifts—homemade kim chee from a Korean patient, an embroidered sampler from a young girl, and bottles of scotch and bourbon from appreciative anesthesiologists.

Despite all of my father's accomplishments personally and professionally, he was fundamentally a modest person. It was said that he received a nearly unanimous vote to be Captain of the Yale baseball team of 1943. The only dissenting vote was his own. He was not afraid to admit error. At the wedding of my younger sister, Rosemary, he asked my forgiveness for his initial reluctance to accept my decision to marry my husband. With tears in his eyes he said "With Rosemary's wedding, God has given me a second chance, I don't deserve this chance, but God has given it to me anyway." With such words I knew I was in the presence of a great man.

My father was a happy man endowed with great *joie de vivre*. He loved parties and social events of all kinds. He was famous for his rendition of the song, "McNamara's Band," a command performance at the end of many parties. He would truly regard today's event as a celebration of his life. He would have so many wonderful things to say to all of you. He would thank Tom Kane and Ted Harada for their tireless efforts over the last few months on his behalf. He would be so proud that Emmett Aluli, a member of

Hawaii's first graduating medical school class, and Brad Wong, one of his former residents, would speak to you. Both symbolize his dream of a four-year medical school in Hawaii. He would remember with Peter Barcia the importance of training military and his impact on young military doctors. He would be pleased that Tom Rienzi, his friend and walkmate, would assist in celebrating this Mass for him. He would be touched that his brothers and sisters, Mildred, Maryjane, and Bill had traveled so far to be part of this tribute. He would be sad, of course, that Charlie Judd, his Yale classmate and lifelong friend, and his beloved brother Bob could not be here. He would tell you how much each of his children meant to him—each a special person with unique talents. He admitted T.J.'s generosity

and selflessness, Rosemary's warmth and compassion, Sally's keen intellect and spirit, Christal's dedication to scholarship, and Michael's ebullience and humor. As for me, I was his "Beansie Anne," a nickname dating back to his struggling medical student years when we must have consumed a lot of beans. As the eldest child, I was the responsible one, the one who would catch hell (I mean heck) if something went wrong, but also receive abundant praise for success. Of my mother, his high school sweetheart, he would say little, for his smiling Irish eyes would proclaim his love. But above all my father would want you to know, the lesson I learned long ago. There is no hidden wealth in this world, the wealth is here amongst each other.



The Whelan Family

(Standing from left: Michael Whelan, Christal Whelan, Norma Whelan, Thomas J. Whelan, Jr., Thomas J. Whelan III. Kneeling from left: Rosemary Polen, Sharon Weiss, Sally Whelan.)

*Sharon Weiss, M.D., the eldest child, is a pathologist and co-author of the book *Soft Tissue Tumors*. She received her medical and residency training at the Johns Hopkins Hospital and has held positions as Chairman, Department of Soft Tissue Pathology of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, and the first A. James French Professor of Diagnostic Pathology at the University of Michigan. She is currently Professor and Vice Chair of Pathology at Emory University.*

Thomas J. Whelan III, first-born son, is an English teacher at Farrington High School in Honolulu, Hawaii. This year he completed a ten-year project – a family history of the Whelans – that led him to places as far flung as the National Archives in Washington, D.C., and local parishes in Ireland.

Rosemary Polen, R.N., works in the field of health and wellness in Baltimore, Maryland where she specializes in cardiac rehabilitation, senior fitness, and weight reduction. She also coordinates and acts in independent theatrical productions.

*Sally Whelan is the special projects coordinator at the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, a women's health, education, and advocacy organization renowned for the bestseller *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. She facilitates the translations and adaptations of the book by women's organizations around the world, most recently in China and Thailand.*

*Christal Whelan, author and visual anthropologist, resides mostly in Japan. Her book – *The Beginning of Heaven and Earth: The Sacred Book of Japan's Hidden Christians* – has received international recognition along with her documentary – *Otaiya* – scheduled for screening at this year's Margaret Mead Film and Video Festival at the American Museum of Natural History. She is currently working on a film about the tango in three cultures: Japan, Finland, and Argentina.*

Michael Whelan, graduate of the Culinary Institute of America (CIA), and former chef at the Halekulani Hotel's La Mer restaurant, currently teaches culinary arts at Scottsdale Community College in Scottsdale, Arizona.