

# Richard J. Robertson

1926 – 2022



*Mom and Dad 2012*

I'd like to share a bit about my dad, Richard J. Robertson. Not just the customary details like when and where he was born, his education and professional background; but also about the person that my dad was.

My dad was born in Oshkosh, Wisconsin in 1926. He was the first of 3 children and despite some of the hardships brought about by The Great Depression and other events around this time, he and his siblings enjoyed fairly normal childhoods, playing with friends, going to school and the other things that typically fill these years.

After the United States entered World War 2, my dad went to the local Draft Board to inquire about enlisting. He was 17 at the time. He was told that even when he became draftable age, he would be exempt because it was common knowledge amongst the locals on the Draft Board that he would be entering the Seminary after graduating High School. He responded that he wasn't going to stay safe at home when so many others were being drafted or enlisting. He got the required parental approval for early enlistment and joined the US Navy. He would later tell us, his children, that he never really did anything special while in the Navy. He wasn't in any battles and never had any of the horrific experiences suffered by so many others. But I've always considered his Navy enlistment to be a very noble act, especially under the circumstances. My dad remained patriotic for the rest of his life. Not the type of patriotism represented by the often-misquoted statement: "My country, right or wrong;" but by the full statement that ends with: "...if right, to be kept right; and if wrong, to be set right".



My dad later attended the University of Chicago, where he earned his PhD. He greatly appreciated his time at the U. of C. He took classes with Carl Rogers and others who were well known in their respective fields. But he valued two benefits of his time there above all others.

The first was that the U. of C. taught people how to actually think. Not how to memorize, or to regurgitate, but literally how to think. And my dad was a thinker! He has been referred to as a "walking encyclopedia", but most impressive was his ability to listen, thoughtfully consider, and logically think something through. I assume that his intellect, and this ability to "think", are in part what positioned him to embrace PCT. My dad believed strongly in the virtue of PCT and he never missed an opportunity to explain it to others and promote it whenever he could. He was also grateful for his time with Bill Powers, and proud to have been even a small part of something he believed in so strongly.



*Dad, Mary and Bill Powers.*



The second, and most important benefit, was that it was at the University that my dad and mom met. My mom, who was at the U. of C. Hospital for part of her Nursing training was at a church/social event with another Nurse when my dad walked in, bandaged up after breaking a couple of ribs during a wrestling team match earlier that day. That's the day their life together started. When my dad passed, my parents had been married for almost 72 years. And even with the obstacles and pain that life inevitably injects in between the periods of joy and happiness, after over 70 years together, my parents still referred to each other as "my best friend". Although cliché, each of them really have been a half of the wonderful whole that they will always be.



*Mom and Dad goofing around in their first apartment.*

My parents started their family. My mom alternated between her job at the U. of C. Billings Hospital and managing our household. And my dad started his career, working as a supervisor at the Civil Service Commission; a Research Assistant at the Schwab Rehab Institute, later the Hines V. A. Hospital; Professor of Psychology at Northeastern Illinois University; and starting a private psychotherapy practice. It wasn't an accident that my parents both selected careers that directly involved caring for others. They didn't make themselves rich, but they worked very hard, managed their finances very well, saved, and provided for us incredibly well. My brothers and I grew up in a wonderful home, never once

without food, good clothes, medical attention, and lived very comfortably because of their hard work and care. My

brothers and I were never "bad kids", but we took our turns being difficult to raise. But no matter what, our home was filled with care, nurturing, and love.

My parents have always encouraged us to learn and experience things. For example, when my two younger brothers were about 10 years old, they developed an interest in wrestling after catching some episodes of All-Star Wrestling on TV. My dad, who had wrestled at university, seized the opportunity to teach them some actual wrestling moves and then furnished an unused room in the basement of our house with a thick wrestling mat, head-gear, mouth guards and other protective equipment. This served as a wrestling hangout for us and some of our friends for quite a while.

And another example: when I was about 13 I started taking pictures with an old 35mm Exakta camera that my dad had. Once I'd finish a roll of film, I'd take it to the neighborhood Camera store to have the film developed. One day while dropping off film, I bought a "Photography" magazine that had something on the cover that caught my eye. At some point, my dad and I got into a discussion about it. A couple weeks later, my dad took me to show me the darkroom that he'd built in another previously unused room in the basement. The darkroom had a lightproof panel hooked to a rope and pulley that would render the room completely dark, and some of the other things needed to actually develop my own film and print my own photographs. It wasn't fully equipped because in typical fashion, it was also my



responsibility to do the research and learn about the other things that were actually needed, and how to use them. I did, and then we got the other required items together. I learned quite a bit and over time I developed many rolls of film and printed many pictures in my darkroom in the basement.

My dad did so many things to foster curiosity in us, to teach us, to prepare us to be better adults, and to show us that he loved us.

In addition to caring about his family, his students and his patients, my dad cared a lot about the conditions that collectively affect all of us. He cared about social injustice, mental and physical healthcare for all those in need, our environment, etc, etc. So much so that he has consistently donated what he could to so many charitable organizations, and gotten on so many lists as a result, that it's never been possible to be in my parent's house for more than a couple hours without some organization calling looking for another donation. Another example: when a member of our family was injured by some people who either no longer understood their responsibility to protect innocent people; or had perhaps gotten to the point where they were no longer able to handle the stress of their jobs effectively, my dad's response was to offer free counseling services to any of their colleagues who might be struggling with stress. His offer was summarily rejected, but he had offered. Although I'm sure he harbored some of the same anger that the rest of us did, this was a typical response from my dad and reflected his natural desire to do anything he could to care for or help others. If I pull the many examples I have of things like this together into an amalgam, I think my dad just wanted everyone to be good to each other...to support and care about each other...and for each of us to do what we can to take care of each other and our planet so that the future we're borrowing from successive generations can be filled with less hardship, cruelty, suffering and strife, and with more of the things that make life worth living instead.

My dad always worked hard, but he made sure (sometimes with prodding from my mom) to make time to spend with family or friends, enjoying the companionship and doing things together.

For over 60 years, at least once a week, my dad and a group of his friends that had named themselves "The Beer Night Group" would get together at one of their homes, have something to eat, drink some beer, and talk about a wide range of things. This group, getting together weekly for over 6 decades to enjoy each other's company, was so important to my dad. He treasured these people and their friendship.

My dad liked to travel. Our family vacations when we were growing up included a trip to England before crossing the English Channel to spend the summer in Denmark; a drive and hike trip through the Canadian Rockies; trips to Niagara Falls, Oahu, Florida and a number of other states. And trips to visit our grandparents, uncles and aunts in Wisconsin and Minnesota. We also took dozens of trips over the years to Door County, Wisconsin. These trips became a tradition and endured long after



*Dad (wearing a vest) with the original members of "The Beer Night Group".*

my brothers and I had our own families, expanding the group that would descend on Door County in early Fall for many years.



*Dad, mom, 2 sons and 2 daughters-in-law at an overlook.  
Door County, WI..*



*A typical scene of mom and dad being swamped by loving grandkids.  
Door County, WI.*



Dad sifting for diamonds at Crater of Diamonds State Park, Arkansas



Dad trying on an armored helmet at The British Museum

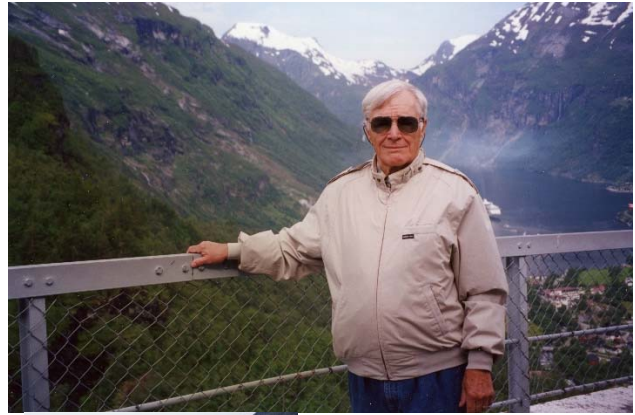


Mom and Dad rafting down the Grand Canyon.



Cruise through the Mediterranean with kids and grandkids.





And many more trips through Europe, Scandinavia, Central America and the Caribbean. My dad liked to be able to immerse himself in the local culture as much as possible, and be a good guest in other countries. He spoke 7 languages and would study the local culture before they arrived.

My dad also really enjoyed skiing, SCUBA diving, tennis and sailing. He taught each of us the basics of skiing and he went on ski trips with my mom, his sons, or friends whenever he could.



Dad snorkeling while on a sail/dive trip with the Beer Night Group.

He had been on some SCUBA adventures, and after each one, he'd share slides of his trip with us after dinner. I was hooked after the first or second slide-show. With my dad's help, I passed my written and open-water tests at the age of 15 and received my SCUBA license. Dad and I went on a number of dive trips in the Great Lakes and dove on some of the many sunken ships that rest at the bottom there.

My dad also really enjoyed playing tennis. He always said that he wasn't very good at it, but just liked to play anyway. He kept playing tennis well into his later years. My wife and I went to Death Valley with my parents. They had been there many years prior, but my dad was fascinated with the Furnace Creek Inn at Death Valley, which is a small but lush oasis in the middle of a vast expanse of sand, rock and salt-flats.



As my dad and

I were walking along a path through the grounds, we passed the tennis courts. My dad commented: "Look, they have clay courts here! I haven't played on clay courts in such a long time. It'd be so nice even to just practice some serves." I told my dad that I'd go check at the reception desk and see if they had rackets and balls that we might borrow. They did. My dad saw me coming back down the path with rackets in my hand and headed through the gate to get a couple of stretches in before I got to him. My dad practiced his serves for a bit and then coaxed me in to volleying with him. If it was true, as he'd always said, that he wasn't very good at tennis, it turned out that even at over 30 years his junior, I was worse. It didn't matter...we were having fun. My dad was a few months away from his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday at the time, swatting away with more precision than his much younger son.



My dad loved sailing. For many years he had a small sailboat that we'd go out on. He also sailed with a friend of his who owned a much larger boat. And a few times, he enjoyed sailing on a large ship as part of a sailing tour. I'm not sure where it came from, but he literally loved being on the water, especially when sailing.



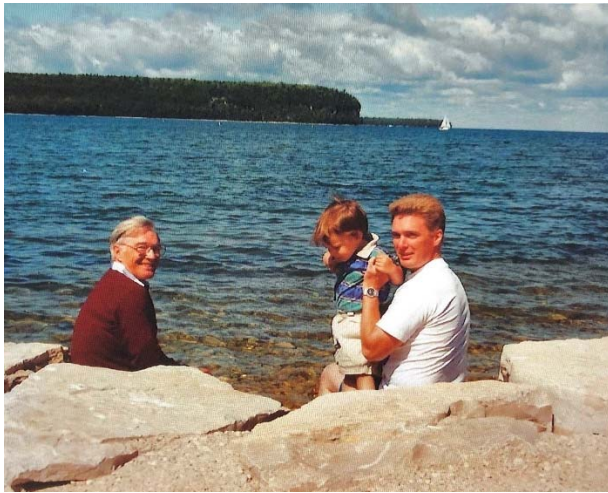
Happy (temporary) Captain on a large schooner.

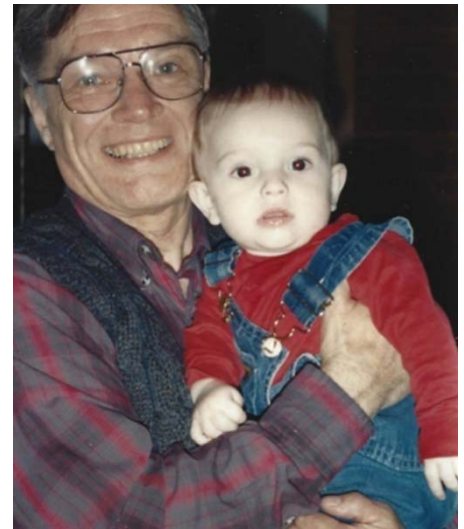


Mom and dad on their boat.



Some pictures of my dad with his wife, children and grandchildren are worth a thousand words in expressing the joy his family brought him, and the love that he so liberally provided to us. I know my dad wasn't ready to leave here just yet. He especially did not want to leave my mom. Their relationship was really something special and a great example of how to do this "marriage/family/grow old together" thing the right way. But I know that when he had to leave, he did so knowing that in his way, he had touched ours and many other lives, and made an impact for the better. He also knew that his wife and the rest of his family loved him dearly. My dad was a kind, gentle and caring person. He greatly appreciated the friendships he enjoyed with you folks in the PCT Association....many having lasted for quite a long time. I hope that he was able to share something of himself with you folks in return. He really was a special person. Thank you for the friendship you shared with him, and everything you did to make him feel welcome.





Eric Robertson, October 2022