

Zoltán Grossman Eulogy for George S. Grossman
Willamette View, Portland OR, August 11, 2018

Thank you all for coming to honor my father, George Stefan Grossman. My parents George and Suzi were married on June 11th, I was born on January 11th at 11:11 pm, my mother passed on November 11th, and my father passed on July 11th, so it's only fitting that we're remembering my father today, on August 11th.

My grandmother Katalin was a Hungarian Jew from Mezőtúr, Hungary, and my Slovak Jewish grandfather Joseph was born in New York. Joseph lived as a child with his mother in his family's hometown of Poltár, Czechoslovakia, then moved to be with his father in Chicago. Joseph worked as a dishwasher in the Palmer House Hotel, but moved back to Poltár in the mid-1930s, a bad time for a Jew to return to Central Europe. They married and my father was born on May 31st, 1938.

When the Germans took over Slovakia the following year, my U.S. citizen grandfather was enslaved in a labor camp, and pleaded with the State Department to renew his passport so the family could escape, but it replied with the impossible requirement that he appear in person at the US Embassy. The family fled to my grandmother's hometown in Hungary, and forced my father to unlearn Slovak and learn Hungarian to not give them away as refugees.

After Germany took over Hungary in 1944, my grandmother's family were deported to Auschwitz, but my grandparents and father were instead interned in a Hungarian camp for enemy aliens, in a park on the outskirts of Budapest. The camp was hit by Allied bombs in July, and they were pulled from the rubble severely injured, but recovered and were moved to a school internment center. (The school still stands today, only a block from the Eastern Train Station that was a flashpoint of the Syrian refugee crisis that we witnessed three years ago.)

On New Year's Eve, 1944, as the Soviet Army closed in on the city, the internment center was taken over by German troops. They marched the Jewish men, including my grandfather, to be executed by the Danube (where a memorial of bronzed shoes marks the massacre site today). A German Wehrmacht officer ordered that the women and children be spared, so the troops took the Jewish women and children to the Budapest ghetto. My father and grandmother escaped from the ghetto, as she pretended to be the widow of a corpse being taken to burial. They were hidden by doctors in a hospital, and helped by the Underground. As I wrote in an [essay](#), my father survived the war only through the kindness of strangers. (See on the website in the program my father's essay "[The Holocaust in Hungary: A Child's Perspective.](#)")

After the war, my grandmother was unable to care for him, and he lived for three years in a few children's institutions around Hungary. (He told us recently that the stories of Central American refugee kids separated from their parents hit very close to home.) In 1948, George's mother remarried, and he spent the school year with his mother and stepfather in Budapest.

In September 1949, he was issued a U.S. passport, and he emigrated at the age of 11 to the U.S., on the same ship that had carried his father. With the aid of the Jewish Community Service, he was placed in a relative's foster home in the Buffalo suburb of Kenmore, New York. There he met my Hungarian immigrant mother Susanna Herczeg, at a performance of her folk

dance troupe. The Jewish city boy and Catholic farm girl would never have met in the Old Country. He graduated from high school in 1956, and enrolled in the University of Chicago, receiving a BA with honors in International Relations. On the day of his graduation in June, 1960, my parents were married.

I was born in January 1962, and after my mother graduated in June with her BA in South Asian Studies, we moved to Palo Alto, California, joined in December by my grandmother and half-uncle Gábor from Budapest. Both remained in California the rest of their lives. My father enrolled at Stanford Law School, and passed the California bar exam. He worked part-time in the Law Library, and decided to become a law librarian.

In 1966 he became Acquisitions Librarian at the University of Pennsylvania, then in 1968 Law Librarian at the University of Utah. (One of his Utah friends, Tasia Young, joins us today.) In Utah, he also earned an MS in Library Science at BYU, and served as President of the Utah ACLU, which sent him with other attorneys to South Dakota for legal aid to Native Americans arrested at the Siege of Wounded Knee. He also a member for several years of the ACLU's Committee on Indian Rights. (I remember my parents taking me on road trips around the West, visiting museums and historical sites, hunting for fossils, and my father exclaiming "tu-dum!" whenever we crossed a state border.)

His career blossomed after he became law librarian at University of Minnesota in 1979, and participated in the planning of a new law school building. The project received awards for library design, and he later served as consultant for the planning of more than thirty law libraries, combining his passions of law, librarianship, and architecture. (Even as he changed rooms recently at Willamette View, he drew up a blueprint for the layout of his furniture.)

In 1979, he transferred to Northwestern University where he participated in the planning of a major extension of the law school's facilities on Chicago's Lake Shore Drive, a building which his father had photographed back in the 1930s. One colleague wrote, "He was always warm, friendly and upbeat--amazing, in light of the horror of his early life. It should not be forgotten that he was an excellent librarian who was sorely missed when he left [Northwestern]." (WE have flowers from his Minnesota friends Kati and David Griffith.)

My father's publications include two anthologies on legal research and history; we have a few extra copies on the table if people would like to have them. He was an active member of the American Association of Law Libraries, and the week that he passed, he was inducted into the AALL Hall of Fame; you can see his award on the table.

My father remained at Northwestern until 1993, when he transferred to the University of California, Davis, where a new law school building was expected, but after 12 years only an extension of the existing building was allowed. Repelled by the heat and chemicals in Davis, my mother moved to San Francisco, and my father joined her on weekends. He retired in 2006, and lived with my mother full-time, until she died in 2008. He remained until 2012 when he moved to Ashland, where he served as volunteer librarian of Temple Emek Shalom (his friends Sam and Kurt join us from Ashland). In 2014, he moved to Willamette View, which he came to see as a welcoming and engaging community. Thank you to the friends and staff members who took good care of him.

My father's compassion and generosity touched many people, and influenced their lives. He always encouraged me to go further than I'd planned in my education, my career, and publishing. His warm kindness uplifted those who knew and loved him. As my Hungarian cousins wrote, "Your father was a miracle. His story is incredible. He will be always in our heartHe had an exceptional life and he is a role model for many of us. His willpower, intelligence, generosity, and his achievements in his career make him unforgettable. A new star shines brightly in the sky."

As his friends wrote, "He was warm, very smart, well informed, highly cultured, with excellent taste, understanding, a sense of humor...[He] was an amazing man - kind, compassionate, forgiving, brilliant, funny, cultured, intellectual...[He] was indeed a kind, generous, and gentle man with a wonderful sense of humor, who wore his erudition lightly...[His] enthusiasm, his wit and his kindness were always a joy to share." As a colleague summed it up, "Warm, wise and witty was George."

His 48 years of marriage to my mother provided a bedrock to them, and a model of happiness for those around them. It is probably no coincidence that I, a Jewish city boy, also married a Christian farm girl, and we've been together for 34 years so far. As one colleague wrote, "what I remember most about time spent with George and Suzi was their obvious love for each other. One hopefully expects that from married couples, but in their case it just radiated out. George had a long and productive life. He was a mensch and people like him are especially missed in these fractious times."

My father did not seem to be afraid of death. As he once told Linda Tofflemire, "I don't know why we're all so afraid. We've been there before. We're on furlough from nothingness!" Parkinson's is a cruel disease that ravaged his body, very quickly in the weeks before his passing. But his mind stayed sharp and his heart stayed warm; he was still cracking jokes and reciting poetry from memory. He also memorized his credit card number and code, joking that "they say you can't take it with you, but I'm taking it with me."

At the end, he was ready to go, and went peacefully, with us by his side. His very last words were about remembering when he met my mother at the folk dance, the moment that I became possible. He knew that I'd be using his Rolodex to settle his estate, so near the front he had secretly put a small photo of me as a baby.

My very best memories of my father were when we walked on any beach, anywhere, he would start reciting Edward Lear's 1871 children's poem "The Owl and The Pussycat," one of the poems he remembered by heart last month. It starts, The Owl and the Pussycat went to sea on a beautiful pea-green boat. They took some honey, and plenty of money, wrapped up in a five-pound note." It told a story that they want to be married, for long they have tarried, but what shall they do for a ring?

The poem gives the solution: "They sailed away, for a year and a day, To the land where the bong-tree grows; And there in a wood a Piggy-wig stood, With a ring at the end of his nose, His nose, His nose, With a ring at the end of his nose. Dear Pig, are you willing to sell for one shilling Your ring?" Said the Piggy, "I will." So they took it away, and were married next day By

the Turkey who lives on the hill. They dined on mince and slices of quince, Which they ate with a runcible spoon”

I always thought of my parents, who were excellent dancers, when I heard the closing of the poem: “And hand in hand on the edge of the sand They danced by the light of the moon, The moon, The moon, They danced by the light of the moon.”

We’ll now hear from some of my father’s friends, in person or in writing. Please sign the Memorium book, and review some of the photos of his life.