

Images of Dad forever etched in my memory



Mark Bliss ~ Mark My Words

Dad died Tuesday.

It's a simple, short sentence that doesn't do justice to his long life.

He was 84 when he died, having battled Parkinson's disease for the past decade.

Becca and Bailey knew him simply as grandpa. They remember him in his frail years.

They can't imagine him in his youthful years, his years in college at Washington University, his courtship of my mother, or their yearlong honeymoon in Europe after World War II courtesy of an architecture fellowship.

They never saw him when he had a strong back that carried me into the Gulf shore waters near Biloxi, Miss., on one of our vacations.

They never saw him as he drove along in the darkness of an early morning in August as we headed south from our home in St. Louis County on our way to visit relatives in Texas. He'd have the window open in the car to let in the breeze. The Plymouth wasn't air conditioned.

They never saw him sitting on the floor playing with his boyhood electric trains at Christmastime and letting me try my hand at the controls.

Keeping up with dad was hard work. He was a quick walker, something I'm sure my children never imagined.

Growing up, I remember having to almost run to keep up with him as we walked along city sidewalks in St. Louis.

Saturdays for Dad were full of chores. He made clipboard lists a mile long of everything he wanted to get done and then was dismayed when he couldn't finish everything by the end of a long Saturday.

I remember his smile, his tireless energy when he was working out in the yard on weekends.

He was politically conservative, but he had a passion for art, music, theater and dance. Growing up, we went to the ballet, the symphony, plays and summer operas.

Dad was an architect by trade who could make even the simplest sketch look grand.

He particularly loved old buildings with their weathered beauty and time-honored styles. He hated to see them torn down for new buildings whose designs he thought were far inferior.

He worked to preserve historic buildings in St. Louis whenever possible.

Dad loved the canvas too. He painted pictures of barns, churches and homes in water colors, not with painstakingly fine lines but with broad brush strokes that made every painting come alive to me. They still speak to me hanging on the walls in my home.

I grew up in a house in Kirkwood where books weren't just a design element. They were well read. Dad loved words.

Dictionaries got a workout in our home. Dad most often knew the definitions, but made me look it up so I'd learn it.

On weekends, we would go on outings to the country where dad would paint. My sister, Emily, and I tried our hand at painting too. But I had trouble with perspective. I never could get things to look right.

Dad never had a problem with perspective. He understood what it took to be a good husband and father.

I wish my children could have seen their grandpa before he was a grandpa.

Dad was the photographer in our family. It was his handiwork that showed up on all those vacation slide shows. But there aren't very many of Dad. He was behind the camera more often than in front of it.

But there are plenty of images of him etched in my memory. Like everything with dad, they're well framed.

Mark Bliss is a staff writer for the Southeast Missourian.

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<http://semissourian.com/opinion/columnists/mbliss/>

Richard L. Bliss, FAIA
born October 30, 1918, in Grand Rapids, Michigan
grew up in Detroit, Kansas City, and St. Louis

Education

Graduated from Washington University 1946
Won Steedman Traveling Fellowship 1946 but didn't use it until 1948, as his honeymoon
Later he was a trustee of the Fellowship
Studied one year at MIT

Career

Worked for P. John Hoener and Wedemeyer, Cernik & Corrubia
Taught at Washington University 1971 to 1996, 25 years

Community Service

Served on boards of Landmarks Association of St. Louis
Landmarks Commission of Kirkwood
Historic Buildings Commission of St. Louis County
Steedman Architectural Library

Honors

Elected a Fellow of the AIA in 1977 for his achievements in historic preservation
Received Rozier Award from Missouri Alliance for Historic Preservation in 1996
2001, President's Medal of Landmarks Association of St. Louis

died February 4, 2003

Memorial Service Friday, February 7, 4 p.m., Eliot Chapel, Kirkwood

Notes from Philip Cotton Jr and from memorial service