

Anthony Mark Wilson Memorial

Hello, thank you all for coming. My dad would be touched by seeing all of you here. As many of you know, he was licensed as a minister for over 50 years and performed many weddings and more than a few funerals and memorial services, including those of his parents and some of his in-laws.

In a magazine article he wrote:

“On the journey from birth to death, there are points of choice and irretrievable departures that determine the route. When we knowingly come to one of these junctures, as we do with marriages, deaths, and graduations, we hold rituals.”

In that spirit, my daughters and I will speak for him today.

Slide 1: Dad with books

It is said that smell is the sense most strongly correlated with memory. The smell I associate with my father is the smell of books. The smell of his study, with all the walls covered in books. The smell of the stacks in the Highline college library. The smell of a new pulp paperback. The smell of comics and books from his childhood that I poured over as a child in my grandparents' house. He had a prodigious ability to consume and assimilate written material. He read voraciously across genres; fiction, philosophy, poetry, technical manuals.

Slide 2: Dad in 1940s

On December 24th, 1940 the Ellensburg Daily Record read

“A son was born to Mr. and Mrs. Thilmore Wilson at the Ellensburg General Hospital this morning. A few hours earlier, the parents had escaped serious injury while on their way to the hospital from their home in

Badger Pocket when their automobile skidded and turned on its side in a ditch on the Badger Pocket road near Thrall. Mrs. Wilson suffered from shock, but was otherwise uninjured. Hospital Attendants said both mother and son were doing well."

The family lived on the farm, which is on what was then called L Wilson Road, named after his grandfather, Leslie Wilson, whose farm was half a mile down the road. His brother Greg was born three years later. My dad grew up on the farm and worked on it as a boy and young man both in the fields and later driving a hay truck.

On the farm in the 1950s one didn't get rid of things that might come in handy. This was a habit he kept all his life. Some of the things he kept had a logic to them - pieces of scrap metal could be used to weld a replacement part in some piece of equipment. Padded envelopes could be reused when selling books online. Some of the things he kept had less obvious purpose. Bottle caps, Starbucks drink stoppers.

Slide 3: with Mom and in army

He attended Ellensburg High School, where he met my mother Mary in detention. The book she was reading caught his attention. It was called *Chocolates for Breakfast* and it was somewhat controversial at the time. She was in detention for talking in class, I don't know what his transgression was. He was, by his own account, ill-behaved when young..

He graduated from high school in 1959 and entered the US Army reserves where he served for two years. I recently found a letter that he'd written in 1961 to his mother, who was also a great reader, where he discussed what he'd been reading, namely *Catcher in the Rye* and *Lord of the Flies*. He had some fairly pointed criticism, but he recognized these works as important and wanted to know what she thought of them.

He didn't particularly enjoy the army, signing that letter "*I'm in the army and I wish I wasn't.*"

After returning to Ellensburg, he attended Central Washington University, graduating with a BA in English in 1965. I don't know much about his college years other than that he became a very good student. Most of the papers he wrote are still organized in his file cabinets.

He and my mother were married in June of that year. In my parents' first years of marriage they lived in a small cabin in Juanita off Lake Washington. They called it The Little House and it was filled with books. He attended the University of Washington and graduated with a Master of Library Science in 1966.

Slide 4, Highline photos

That same year he began working in the Library at Highline Community College. He would work there for the next 40 years, retiring as a Professor, Emeritus in 2006.

Tony became a father when I was born in 1968. In 1972 we moved to Federal Way to the house where he lived for the rest of his life.

Books were everywhere when I was growing up. My mother tells me that money was tight in the first years in Federal Way, but I didn't notice as a child. Often on Fridays we would go out for dinner, sometimes at the Shakey's Pizza near 312th.

On the way home I remember usually stopping at a convenience store. At the time my parents enjoyed spy novels and would pick up a few. I generally chose comic books. The remainder of a typical Friday evening was spent in silence, all of us reading. This was before the days of videotapes or cable TV. The television we had was a 9 inch black and white that wasn't very tempting.

My dad had a flexible relationship with time, and he was a good example of an absent-minded professor. Growing up I remember when grades were

due at the end of the semester, he often stayed up all night grading students' work.

Once, in the days before email and online calendars he found a memo on his desk at work for a meeting on Wednesday the 12th. The problem was that Wednesday was the 11th. He went to the room on Wednesday and when no one was there, he assumed they had really meant the 12th. After again finding an empty room on Thursday, he came to realize that he had come to the meeting a year late.

Knowing how much my dad loved his students I was surprised when he said to me once, that in higher education, a teacher's first obligation was not to their students. He said their first obligation was to their discipline.

There are a couple of quotes from articles he wrote for the magazine Alki that illustrate his views on his discipline.

Writing about the stereotypical image of a librarian with glasses and hair in a bun he says:

"In her shush-and-glue role in the library, she is not an action expert or a subject expert; she is an expert on doorways. Ask her and she will open a door to a larger world. Sometimes I think of her as a mythical creature on the banks of a dark river. In response to your question she will launch you on a raft to an unknown destination with no guarantee to anyone that you will return. The bun and the glasses keep her the right distance from your adventure."

He also wrote:

"as librarians we should not become smug little missionaries carrying the unblemished truth of the alphabet to the poor, ignorant natives. Rather we should, with some humility, assist those who choose to abandon one worldview to learn another."

My dad was devoted to the idea of the library, and he developed a comprehensive and opinionated view of its role in human society.

After retirement he was active in a number of volunteer activities most notably the South King County Tool Library, and the Armed Defense Training Association. He enjoyed a number of hobbies including cooking, reading, kayaking, and painting.

He and my mother continued as intellectual partners for the rest of their married life, and he died two weeks short of their 57th wedding anniversary.

Slide 5: Dad in the last year.

My dad didn't talk much about himself and the fact that he had been sick was likely a surprise to most who knew him, if they hadn't seen him in the last year. I don't think he was being secretive, he just didn't find it all that relevant. I'll tell you about the end of his life, which I hope can be helpful in thinking about his passing.

In 2019 he began to have trouble with the vision in his right eye. After a series of diagnostic tests he was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, a form of blood cancer. While I remember him talking about it a little bit at the time, he didn't seem particularly concerned. I know now that, while steady improvement has been made in the treatment of multiple myeloma, it is not something one can get over. It is manageable, until it isn't. It affects the proteins in blood which ultimately causes kidney failure.

He began treatment and I remember him describing going in every couple of weeks for blood tests, and sometimes injections or infusions. There were a couple of times when his treatments were severe enough to make him extremely tired for a couple of weeks, but it seemed sort of cyclical from my perspective. He and my mom were keeping track of their appointments and had some help around the house.

Looking through his files I found some poems he'd written, including this one, dated September 2020, presumably inspired during a drive home from an oncology appointment.

A Good Day

Heavy industrial traffic North
out of sunlit Fife
The semi beside me
towing a new, unpainted
flat aluminum trailer.
All these people out here
doing and doing
and happy to be doing it.

In May of 2022 things changed. My dad called me from the emergency room. Since he was on the phone with me, my first thought was that they were there for my mother, but he said "Apparently we're here for me". He seemed confused about what was going on in a way that he hadn't been before. On the way to the hospital I talked to his oncologist for the first time, who explained that he was having kidney failure, and that they had directed him to go to the ER.

This was the start of what, in retrospect, was a steady decline. He was in the hospital for a few days, before his kidney numbers improved enough for him to be discharged. I began taking him to his oncology appointments, and at the first one after his hospitalization, the doctor explained the myeloma had stopped responding to the previous course of treatment. Dad began a different course of drugs that took a dramatic toll on him.

Over the summer of 2022, he became increasingly unable to form new memories. He had a port installed in his chest for blood draws and transfusions, and over that summer I spent a number of quiet days sitting with him in hospitals while he received blood transfusions. After another

hospitalization in August, which was the first time I heard the phrase “palliative care” in connection with my dad, the aggressive cancer drugs were scaled back. The cancer reacted well and he bounced back a little over the fall. In the winter he began to lose weight fairly steadily, and it became difficult to get him to eat.

Over this year he grew quieter and quieter. He never complained. If you asked him how he was, he’d say fine. If pressed he’d say he was tired. We’d drive twice a week along the Hylebos waterway to get to his oncologist. He was generally silent, but would occasionally make a comment, inquiring about his granddaughters or commenting on something seen on the road. Though he couldn’t remember what had happened 10 minutes ago, he could still discuss things he’d read in college. He was in a bit of a fog, however, and didn’t seem to grasp his current situation.

In the winter and spring his weight loss accelerated, and by mid May, it was clear that he was approaching the end. On Memorial Day weekend he began to have trouble swallowing. That Monday was the last time he got out of bed. Hospice began coming on Wednesday, and he had visitors Wednesday and Thursday who he was glad to see. He was having trouble speaking much but could answer yes or no questions. Throughout Thursday he continued to assert he wasn’t in discomfort, and that he just wanted to rest. On Friday morning he wasn’t really responsive. I sat with him most of that morning, and he died about 1PM.

I don’t think I ever saw my father despair. He was quiet and steady though everything I saw him experience in life. Something that is raw for me right now, is that I didn’t get to experience the result of his intellect facing his own death. If I’m honest, I somehow assumed that as he approached his own end, he’d do it with great clarity and share with me some brief but brilliant insights into mortality.

My daughter Deepika will now read a poem that I first heard when he read it as part of his father’s memorial, and heard it again at my uncle’s service. It was appropriate for how my grandfather died, and it now feels very appropriate for how my father died.

Deepika

Mark Strand, *in an elegy for his father wrote (with minor adaptations for our needs today)*:

Nothing could stop you.
Not the best day. Not the quiet. Not the ocean rocking.
You went on with your dying.
Not the trees
Under which you walked, not the trees that shaded you.
You went on with your dying.
Nothing could stop you. Not your wife
Who fed you and made you into a child again.
Not your son who thought you would live forever.
Not the wind that shook your lapels.
Not the stillness that offered itself to your motion.
Not your shoes that grew heavier.
Not your eyes that refused to look ahead.
Nothing could stop you.
You sat in your room and stared at the city
And went on with your dying.
You went to work and let the cold enter your clothes.
But nothing could stop you.
You went on with your dying.
Nothing could stop you.
Not the past.
Not the future with its good weather.
Not the view from your window, the view of the graveyard.
Not the city. Not the terrible city with its wooden buildings.
Not defeat. Not success.
You did nothing but go on with your dying.
You put your watch to your ear.
You felt yourself slipping.
You lay on the bed.
You folded your arms over your chest and you dreamed of the world
without you,
Of the space under the trees,
Of the space in your room,

**Of the spaces that would now be empty of you,
And you went on with your dying.
Nothing could stop you.
Not your breathing. Not your life.
Not the life you wanted.**

My sister Savita will now say a few words.

Savita's words

Slide 6: Savita and cooking

Hello everyone. My name is Savita and I am one of Tony's granddaughters. Many of you may not know, but for as long as I can remember my family and I would go over to my grandparents' house for dinner every Sunday. We would spend some time catching up and eating hors d'oeuvres before we sat down for dinner. It was there that I first tried Brie, which is now my favorite kind of cheese. Once he realized I liked cheese and crackers so much he always made sure to put out at least two cheeses he had picked earlier that week just for our Sunday dinners. He would keep the wrapper so we could know exactly what we were eating. Food was always something special for him. He loved to cook and my family and I always benefited from it. Some Sundays it was paper thin lasagna like nothing else I've ever tasted, some Sundays it was burgers on homemade hamburger buns, or my personal favorite Thai Pizza. Thai Pizza is what it sounds like, a pizza with Thai style flavors and toppings and was probably the first meal I learned to prepare from start to finish. That's because once he realized my sister and I liked to help him in the kitchen, he made easy-to-follow instructions for us, with all the ingredients measured out and prepped just for us. It was always a meal we looked forward to because it meant time in the kitchen and he made it possible. Eventually he didn't even need to help us, we knew exactly what to do, but we'd always check in with him just in case. We had to know if the pizza was

cooked through or needed more time in the oven, things like that. The pizza always turned out great, but the experience made it better.

My grandpa was a man of very few words, but we always had a really good time together. At dinner we typically sat next to each other and he was always very observant. He made sure everyone had their wine that he had specially picked for dinner or that they got meat cooked to a temperature they would prefer. He never said anything when he watched me feed a bite of food to the dog, he'd just look at me and smile. When dessert came, he always wanted ice cream, so I'd always make sure to give him a little extra. I'd ask if what I served him was good and he'd always say yes. Then I'd scoop a little more and offer him that. He'd always smile a bit and say yes. Food was always really special to him.

I've always felt like my grandpa and I had a special connection. Like I said he never talked a lot but somehow we had an understanding of each other that never needed to be talked about. He was incredibly supportive of really everything I did, especially my schooling. It's partially because of him that I was able to go to such good universities. He loved hearing about the books we were reading and the papers I had written for school. He always made time to take an interest in what I shared with him. It always felt good to see him smile after he read something I wrote.

My dad just sent me an email with a folder he found on my grandpa's computer titled for Savita that was full of poems my grandpa wrote. So now instead of me sharing my writing with him I'd like to share his writing with you.

This poem is called Cheese Class

It's made with three milks,
the teacher said.
Sheep, goat, and cow.
You can taste them each
across your tongue.

But first, what does it
smell like?
Smells like dog, I said.
Can you find a better word,
asked the teacher.
But the guy beside me
says, Yes, like when
you pet your dog.

The grandchildren came.
Their mother said,
smells like dog.
Here, I said to
their little dog,
holding out a small piece.
It smells like you.

By Tony Wilson

Thank you.

Ben Conclusion

Slide 7: Dad in kitchen

For the past few years of his life, my dad was reading mostly pretty challenging stuff; serious literary fiction, philosophy, physics, and sociology. He enjoyed lighter fare, but told me he didn't feel that he had enough time left to include it anymore, given the serious stuff he wanted to get through. In the last two years he was reading from the book *Of Time and Lamentation - Reflections on Transience* by Raymond Tallis. He left tiny sticky notes in books and magazines for passages that he wanted to remember or to share with others. I remember him reading to me from this book a couple of times, and mentioning that he was enjoying it. A few days after he died, I noticed it on the table in the living room. I had a brief

thought that I'd read the book immediately, but it is challenging. I read the passages he marked and they were deeply difficult conceptual explorations of science and philosophy.

One of the first passages in the book that he marked feels very relevant for us today. Raymond Tallis writes:

"It has often been said that philosophy should teach one how to die. As a doctor I have seen enough of dying to be aware of the distance of most philosophical thought from the final phase of our return to the earth which has supported our singular existence. Nevertheless, I do believe we should use the idea of death to enhance our sense of life and its mystery. Life at its most abundant is life lived in full consciousness of its finitude, in luminous awareness that our hands will grasp and our eyes will see and our hearts will beat for only a while. The art of living is also the art of outliving: to get over those who have "gone before" without becoming shallow. A meditation on time - on the mystery of the past we shared with them, the passage of time that took us past them, the future that seems to lie like a buffer between this moment and death - is an appropriate kind of memento mori, a way of getting closer to the unthinkable."

I still plan to read the book, but regret that his sticky notes end halfway through.