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A Father's Profound Impact

Kevin Malcolm

James Adamson Malcolm was born in Gourrock, Scotland, the third of four children. His father died when he was 4 and his mother passed when he was 12. However, born with a keen intellect and a stubborn Scottish work ethic, he toiled tirelessly at multiple jobs to put himself through school.

He was incredibly persevering and resilient – skills he developed through these early challenges in life. A Labour Government in Britain had devised access to Higher Education based on intellect and hard work. Dad gained access to the University of Glasgow where he graduated with a Masters of Arts in Classical Greek and Latin along with a teaching degree. For a poor, Catholic young man, orphaned at the age of 12, to receive such an outstanding education was an amazing testament to Dad's fortitude and sharp mind.

One of the things Dad valued so much for my brothers and me, and our children, was education. He had a deep respect for knowledge and learning borne out of his own persistence in overcoming life's early challenges.

Then, round about this time, another important monumental thing happened in Jim Malcolm's life. He met Mom. Here is the way Dad used to tell the story: Mom was at Mass one Sunday morning in Scotland sitting beside my godmother and lifetime family friend, Patricia O'Connor. Mom turned to Patricia and said, "Oh my! Who is that handsome, distinguished, debonair looking man over there! Do you know him?" Aunt Patricia responded, "No –



but I know the short, dumpy wee guy beside him!"

Dad was well known for his apocryphal stories and we are pretty sure this is one of them. But he was also known for his sharp, keen, never hurtful sense of humour, always self-deprecating and never at the expense of another's feelings.

Mom and Dad were inseparable for the next 54 years. Mom described Dad as her "Anam Cara," two Gaelic words that translate roughly as "soul friend." Not long after they met, Dad told Mom, "The first time I saw your face, I knew I loved you." These too were the last words he said to her before he closed his eyes and slipped away.

Both Mom and Dad were models of

devotion and love for us growing up, selfless in their care for each of us, above their own comfort and wants: "Love is patient, Love is kind, Love is never boastful ..."

Royal Air Force

Dad was also adventurous. He served in the Royal Air Force for six months in Baghdad. The Air Force quickly recognized his sharp mind and intellect and his proficiency for language acquisition. They sent him on a course to learn Russian as an interpreter and then to Moscow to further hone this language in which he quickly became fluent.

That's right, you heard correctly. I said Russian. Dad's job was to fly in British fighter jets just in and out of Russian air space in order to intercept Russian radio transmissions and translate them for the British.

To my brothers and I growing up, this made Dad on par with James Bond 007 and added to our hero worship. It also added greatly to our repertoire at school when we played the game "Oh yeah? Well my Daddy flew in fighter jets and he was a Russian Interpreter." It was pretty cool when you were 8; it's still pretty cool when you are 48!

Fluent in Russian, in ancient Greek and Latin too – conversational ability in French, Spanish and ... Scottish. (The jury is still out on English). Not bad for a wee lad from Gourrock.

From Scotland to Toronto

When his military service ended, Dad returned home and began teaching English and Latin at St. Columba's High School in Greenock.

And the family began to arrive – Brendan first in 1964.

Mom and Dad arrived in Toronto in 1966 and Dad took a job teaching English at Neil McNeil High School – thus beginning a lifelong friendship with the Holy Ghost Fathers, or the Spiritans as they are now known.

Then he applied for and got hired as a Vice Principal at St. John's Kingston Road in 1968 with the Metropolitan Separate School Board.

Much to the world's dismay, I arrived in 1969 followed by Adrian in 1973. Three boys and the family was complete.

I speak on behalf of my brothers when I publicly state that we won the lottery in the parent department. We could not have had more loving, caring, devoted people guiding our lives. And I speak for all three sons when I publicly thank them for all they have done for us over the years. We love you both and always will.

Dad served as Principal at Annunciation, Precious Blood and Our Lady of Fatima schools. After Fatima he was promoted to Assistant Superintendent of Personnel, now called the Human Resources Department (we know that only the best and brightest get to work in HR in our Board!).

One of his primary areas of responsibility was travelling across the country hiring teachers for the MSSB. He was a passionate and fervent defender of Catholic Education, not by shouting the loudest, but by his quiet, humble actions on a day-to-day basis. He retired in 1991.

"Are you Jim Malcolm's son?"

For years, my brothers and I would run into people and upon hearing the family name the first response was always, "Are you Jim Malcolm's son?" Then the stories would begin. You see, Dad was, at heart, a very kind, honest, empathetic and loving person. And he touched many, many lives with his beautiful nature.

During our lives we have heard things like "I was new to Canada and 7 years old. I was scared at my new school and Mr. Malcolm, my Principal,

said that everything was going to be OK. And that he had come to Canada as an immigrant himself, and then he smiled and took me to class and he was so nice. And I'm now 46 years old and I have never forgotten how kind he was to me." Or "Your dad started me on my teaching journey when he visited us at the University in Newfoundland." Or "He was the most intelligent man I ever met. He inspired me to become a teacher." Or "When my family fell on hard times, he helped me through the St. Vincent de Paul Society until I got on my feet again. And he never judged me. I never forgot his compassion."

This has gone on and on throughout all of our lives. All of us still aspire daily to be just like him.

I think "humble" best sums it all up. Dad never boasted about himself or his fantastic accomplishments. He let his actions speak for themselves.

The grandchildren appear

The family grew and Helen, Lisa and Meagan arrived.

Then the grandchildren began to appear: James was first, followed by Andrew, Stuart, David, Nicholas, and Colin.

Any of the educators in the church notice a pattern here?

And then – along came Sarah! God help the first guy who asks her out on a date. He will have to run the gauntlet of one older brother and five older male cousins.

Dad doted on each and every one of his grandkids. He loved them, spoiled them, played with them, spun amazing fantasy adventures with them involving castles, knights, princesses, dragons and Jimmy the Weasel – a loveable villain created purely out of his imagination – always with a happy ending, the protagonist triumphant in the end. He loved his grandkids fiercely and they in turn worshipped him.

Embodiment of servant leadership

It would take me a good eight hours to fully tell you what an amazing human being our father was and is. But if I did that, then the sandwiches in there wouldn't keep and Jim would never want to see anything go to waste.

So what else was Dad? Here goes with the Reader's Digest version:

Dad was kind, compassionate, an awesome academic, knowledgeable on multiple topics, empathetic, the best listener I have ever known, an incredible husband, father, grandfather and teacher. He was spiritual, an ardent and faithful parishioner here at St. Joseph's, charitable, hilariously funny and authentic.

But I think "humble" best sums it all up. Dad never boasted about himself or his fantastic accomplishments. He let his actions speak for themselves. He was the embodiment of servant leadership and he never let his ego get in the way of doing the right thing. He was our hero, our best friend, our role model and our inspiration.

And we, as a family, are deeply grateful. We are grateful that he was our husband, our father and our grandpa. We are grateful he touched so many people's lives. We are grateful he knew and loved our children and we are grateful that he did not suffer in the end.

Dad never stopped loving Mom, his sons, his grandchildren, his daughters-in-law, his sisters and extended family, his friends.

Dad, we love you and we always will. Sleep peacefully in the arms of the angels. You have well deserved it. Until we meet again. ■