**EULOGY FOR MY FATHER**

An author once said:

“One life on this earth is all that we get, whether it is enough or not enough, and the obvious conclusion would seem to be that at the very least  we are fools if we do not live it as fully and bravely and beautifully as we  can.”

Well let me tell you, my Father Richard Keller was no fool, and he did exactly what that author said we should. For his 87 years, he lived a full, beautiful and brave life. In many ways, though he wasn’t huge in stature, he was larger than life.

He started his life as “Baby Keller” (what his birth certificate still read), Donald and Skeeter, a skinny red-headed boy with big ears, living with  his parents and brother Roger and sister Judy in the Ridgewood area of  Brooklyn/Queens. He talked often about his summers at camp, going to high school at Brooklyn Tech, and going to the movies by his  Grandfather’s apartment in Woodhaven.

And while we didn’t know him then, we knew he must have been special, because he won over a girl from the neighborhood, Mary Emrich (or  Marie, as many of you knew her). Richard and my Mom Mary married in 1958, and had six children. Add in the dogs, rabbits, gerbils and goldfish, and well Plymouth Blvd in Smithtown was always a happening  place. And while Dad would say that Mom did all the work, his influence was always there. My siblings and I have so many memories growing up,  and it’s funny how you remember some small things the most. Things like:  how he brought home flowers for Mom from the train station most nights  after work, how we went out to the diner each pay day for a treat, how his  kisses each night were always the loudest, how dinner always had some  kind of meat and potatoes, how he kept the chocolate syrup to himself  because he hated to drink plain milk, how we learned more colorful words  each summer when he readied the pool at the beginning, or assembled our  Christmas toys. We always knew how proud he was of us, and I like to think I got my love of reading and learning from him, as I remember him  always reading when he had down time. His mind was always working,

waiting to learn something new. Thanks to him and Mom, while we did not have much money left over after the bills were paid, we never did  without love, fun times, or the other things that mattered most.

I love how we became even closer the older we all got. I will miss discussions with him of political and current events, listening to the stories  of his life, and garnering all the wisdom I could get from him, even if we  did not always agree with each other’s views.

But as much as we would have loved to have him all to ourselves, we  knew that he had a calling to service like very few people have ever  experienced. We shared him with his FDNY family. He spent the early  days of his 36 year career at Engine 18 in Greenwich Village and the later  days at the city-wide Haz Mat unit in Queens. He talked often about those  days, regaling us with stories of the pranks, shared meals, and comradery  with his fellow firefighters. I have spoken with his Haz Mat friends about  how much he meant to them as a friend, and that while they referred to  him fondly as the old man and even had a DNR hanging over his bunk,  they knew that he had their back every time the bell rang, and how they  could always learn from his wisdom and years of experience. It still  amazes me how in his 40s he took on all new training in chemistry and  different sciences to join the Haz Mat unit. And my siblings, nieces and nephews and I will never forget the Christmases where he played  Santa. With those ruddy cheeks and a growing girth, he was a natural.

Then there was his Smithtown FD family who he volunteered so much of his time with for 58 years. He quickly rose up the ranks to Chief of the Department, and was later elected to the position of Fire  Commissioner. He spent many an hour training younger members and giving instruction at fires and accidents. As I look out at all of the men and women in uniform, I can confidently say, I am sure almost every one of you benefitted from my Dad’s mentoring, training and wisdom. And I know he had a special place in his heart for all of the members of  Company 5 over the years. His influence and friendships branched out to other departments in Suffolk County. If there was a committee or council dealing with firefighting, training or disaster relief, my Dad was on it.

He was so highly regarded that they asked him to be part of the effort in the days after the WTC attack to coordinate sending the volunteer  ambulances, fire engines and trucks to Ground Zero and other firehouses  in NYC to help in the relief and to make sure NYC was kept safe. Again, he amazed me with his call to service, as I knew inside his heart was  breaking over the loss of so many people he knew, especially his friend  Dennis.

While My Dad was retired on 9/11, and so he was not present too much down at Ground Zero, I still feel so blessed that we had him with us for  such a long time. You see my Father not only risked his life every time he went into a burning building or handled the toxic chemicals at his Haz  Mat calls, he was a survivor from the moment he was a child. His family’s home went on fire when he was little and they all narrowly escaped. He lost so many of his colleagues in 1966 in the fatal 23rd Street fire, and when  he worked in the early days at the Brooklyn Navy Yard as an apprentice  machinist, he was on the USS Constellation when there was a fire on  board.

Yes, he was a survivor and, as my sister Nancy called him, he was our Superman. But those years in the fire service and life itself eventually took their toll. And though he told us that he wanted to live to 100, we lost him on his 87th birthday. And while I cannot even express in words how much I will miss my Dad, my family and I know that even Superman  must say goodbye. I know there will be great joy up in heaven when Dad is reunited with my Mom, his family and friends, Father Dan, and the  colleagues he lost over the years.

Rest in peace, Dad. Your work is done here. Your family will carry on the lessons you shared and make you proud. And generations of firefighters will use your wise advice as they too continue to serve and  protect.