

Andrew Mark Isserman - My Husband

June 28, 1947 - November 4, 2010



My husband, “Andy,” was born in New York, N.Y., and grew up on American military posts in Germany and Austria. He returned to the United States to attend Amherst College in Massachusetts, graduating in 1968. He received a Ph.D. in regional science from the University of Pennsylvania and had a distinguished career in the fields of urban planning and agricultural economics as a professor at the University of Iowa, West Virginia University and the University of Illinois. Andy and I were married for 33 years and had two wonderful sons. He passed away while playing basketball with colleagues.

Andy was a beloved son, husband, father, friend, coach, colleague, scholar, mentor, alphabetizer of spices, researcher of durable goods, connoisseur of Trader Joe’s, sailboat First Mate, maker of smoothies, planner of adventures, and so much more. He is fiercely missed.

He Bounced

He bounced.

He laughed and loved and cried and yelled and apologized, like everyone. But he bounced for all of it.

He bounced from thought to thought, person to person, book to book.

Not fickle. Just bouncing.

Exhilaratingly, exhaustingly, one-more-thing one-more-thoughtingly,

he bounced.

He bounced while he walked, like many. He bounced while he talked, like some. He bounced while he taught, like few. But he bounced for all of it, for everything, like no one else.

And now, a bright orange ball with no regard for physics or age or deadlines, hurled with infinite energy down a long, bright court lined with friends and fans,

he bounces.

-Noah Isserman



Gone from My Sight

I am standing upon the seashore. A ship, at my side, spreads her white sails to the moving breeze and starts for the blue ocean. She is an object of beauty and strength. I stand and watch her until, at length, she hangs like a speck of white cloud just where the sea and sky come to mingle with each other.

Then, someone at my side says, "There, she is gone"

Gone where?

Gone from my sight. That is all. She is just as large in mast, hull and spar as she was when she let my side. And she is just as able to bear her load of living freight to her destined port.

Her diminished size is in me — not in her. And, just at the moment when someone says, "There, she is gone," there are other eyes watching her coming, and other voices ready to take up the glad shout, "Here she comes!"

And that is dying.

-Henry Van Dyke





My dad was reliable, and although he was also reliably 10-15 minutes late, I can say that he never let me down once in my life. When I went to him with a problem, I could count on him to help me find wonderful solutions and creative ideas. But often dad just being himself was all that I needed.

12 years ago, I was on my way home for Thanksgiving when I was pulled over by the highway patrol for driving far too fast outside of Peoria. I called him from a payphone, near tears, feeling like a huge failure. I told him the story and asked him what I should do, rather than rebuking me further, he simply said, “well, I guess you should just keep driving home.” Which is exactly what I needed to hear.

We made a good team, and he'd often tell me that in a tough spot, he'd want me on his side, and I felt the same way.

Athletics were always important to my dad, and many of our conversations revolved around our shared love of the New York Yankees and the Illinois basketball team.

As you saw from many of the pictures in the foyer, he was our coach for many seasons of basketball and soccer (coaching based on well researched techniques of course), and our home was a happy, warm, and safe place filled with



pickup games in the driveway, and custom-made plywood window covers to convert the garage into a kicking wall for soccer practice. He taught me how to shoot a jump shot and had an outdoor light installed so we could play basketball even when it was dark outside.

He was also very supportive of our athletic careers as we got older; in high school he came to all of my track meets, and his pride and joy in my performances were palpable. I'll never forget the image of one particular 800 meter race as I turned the final corner into the home stretch in my peripheral vision I saw my father racing along the grandstands in his green Columbia windbreaker urging me to victory.

Later in college he and our mom made very frequent trips to see me play soccer all over the Midwest from Northern Wisconsin to Iowa and Minnesota—sometimes as two of just a five or ten spectators. We'd talk frequently and he'd give me post game notes about ways I could improve my game. His coaching and support also helped Noah to a soccer career at NCAA division three power-house Amherst College.

And while sports were important to our family, there was so much more to our relationship. We talked about philosophy, religion, medicine, politics, music, and the future. The two of us travelled together to Poland, Italy, Spain, and

Austria. He taught me so many life skills from map reading, to getting the best deals on airline tickets, from writing an essay, to using consumer reports for all of my important durable goods purchases. But beyond that he taught me that excellence comes from within, that honesty and integrity are the only way to approach the world, and that optimism and hard work will get you further than cynicism every time.

I'm also grateful for the fact that, as my brother put it, we've both been able to know dad as adults and to enjoy his company as equals. And although planning this event was difficult, it was made easier because we had such a strong sense of who he is as a person.

We've also seen our father's human frailties and realized that he was not impervious to the unpredictability of life. This was no more apparent than when he went into the hospital with chest pain four and half years ago and came out with two stents in his one of his coronary arteries. He'd made many lifestyle changes since that time, and had a healthy heart exam just two months prior.

As a doctor, I can't help but think about what happened to my dad from an analytical point of view. And the more information I hear about what happened that night, the more certain I am that playing basketball was not the cause of his



death. At this point, I believe that this heart attack would have occurred regardless of what he was doing at 8pm on November 4th.

Although he died far too young, with so many things that he still wanted to do, I take a great deal of comfort that he went out on top, as a self-actualized man, as an eminent scholar, and with a closely knit family who laughed so often, who loved and respected each other so very much, and left none of it unsaid, and I am happy and proud that he was doing something he loved when he passed away.

The last time we spoke was two days before he died, it was 11pm on election night. We talked for 18 minutes about the results of the elections, the latest Illinois basketball pre-season game, and our plans for coming home at Thanksgiving. When it was time to hang up, I said, “I love you, pops”, and he said “I love you too, son”. And I know that we both meant it.

-Jacob Isserman



He had so much more he wanted to do and was filled with plans on Thursday morning.

He was exhilarated and exhausted; he was exhilarating and exhausting.

His driving need to work on myriad articles, classes, letters, emails, comments, book reviews, syllabi, etc with such perfection and such attention to detail, sometimes made me feel cheated of Andy's time and attention. But, in these last few days I have felt and read the tidal wave of love, respect, and thankfulness from so many people towards my Andy. It makes me feel so good that my sharing of him for the past 35 years was for a meaningful and real cause. The prodigious academic energy and enthusiasm he

directed towards his colleagues and students has made a large and important difference in the lives of many.

Andy also put the same amazing skills to research, assimilate information, and move forward into so many parts of our lives together and as the parents of Jacob and Noah.

- Energy into creating our wedding ceremony and honeymoon to Asia,
- buying our homes,
- adopting our dogs, raising our two wonderful sons and learning to be their basketball and soccer coach, the team manager, their teacher of punctuation, presenter of music, planner of trips, organizer of closets, and alphabetizer of spices. He always could help make a good idea better -- a good letter, great. He helped us all work through life's

problems, large and small with tender and focused attention.

I had hoped for a bigger share of Andy as we aged and in the last few years we had made a concentrated effort to see the beautiful Northwest, Hawaii and the Caribbean. We, of course, had the best guidebooks and topo maps to plan our adventures. We saw and experienced the magnificence of volcanoes, mountains, rivers, lakes, oceans, beaches, waterfalls, canyons, blowholes and forests.

He read in a Jewish philosophy book about a man who presented himself to God as a good man who had worked hard. And God asked him, "Did you take time to enjoy the beauties of my earth?" That man said no,

but Andy will say, "Oh yes, God. I hiked and looked and was transformed by the beauty of your earth, and I worked to protect it and to help educate your people to know themselves and each other, and to find love and meaning and understanding."

In the heaven I imagine, Andy will work with my mom and dad on the sunset, sunrise, and rainbow committee, and he will read and attend lectures and discussion groups. Maybe his boundless energy and good ideas can help guide us all towards peace and respect for one another despite our differences. I will watch for small miracles all the days of the rest of my life.

-Ellen Jacobsen-Isserman





It's tempting to think that just because my dad died so suddenly, and so relatively young, that it's a tragedy. It's not.

People die burdened with regrets of things undone and thoughts unspoken. They die of broken hearts or loneliness, of neglect or indifference. That's tragic.

Nothing in my dad's life was tragic, not in the way that matters. Dozens and hundreds and thousands of us will miss him and mourn him, not because his life *wasn't* complete, but it *was*.

The many of you here that have been lucky enough to spend time with him and with us – the people who make our lives so rich – will know neither he nor our family were the kind of people to leave things unexamined or unsaid.

The last time I told him that I loved him was at 6:11PM on November 4, on Skype, after we picked out a good pair of shoes for his return to the basketball court. We talked, as friends who love each other do, about how proud we both were that he had finished grading his papers in time to play, and how he thought he could get used to being done with work in time for evenings with mom or in the gym.

I'm sure I don't yet grasp all the ways that I'll miss him, but I am sure of countless ways that I'll remember him. He lived fiercely and fully and curiously and tardily – 63 years is an amazingly long time to keep that up, and I feel that number, 63 years, somehow fails to count the tens of thousands of time he managed to add in “one last thing” or “one more story.”

Let's mourn that we don't have him with us for laughter and counsel and warmth. But let's not mourn his life, and let's keep telling his stories. And then maybe just one more.

-Noah Isserman