

In Memory of my Father
by Allison Sheer Boomer
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I am the middle child of Dan Sheer's three daughters. When Lolin Wang-Bennett at the University of Houston contacted me about plans for a dedication to my father at the new Health and Biomedical Sciences Building on campus, I suggested we build a webpage to honor him.

As we planned the website and discussed what to include, Lolin shared with me marvelous stories about my dad she was hearing from colleagues and students. We decided to include these heartfelt testimonials. Although, I only knew about my dad's work life from a distance, I want to share here a personal account of him as a father. I also want my two sons (now 23 and 19) to know more about their grandfather who died when my older son was a mere two years old.

Dad and I were close and we engaged in conversations that could go on for hours. He was a good listener; something I appreciate now that I've had children of my own. He also patiently taught me to play chess during my elementary school years. I was never a great chess player, and I don't recall him ever "letting" me win a competition, but I believe the chess skills he taught me were eventually helpful to him. During our last chess games together, weeks before he died, my father was so focused on winning that he was able to suspend his sadness about getting cancer for a short time.

A funny man with a great sense of humor, dad was a real character! He loved to laugh, tell jokes, and was most often the one laughing the loudest at his own amusing stories. He adored people, parties, music, dancing, and especially, food. There are too many entertaining food stories to recall them all here, but you can take my word for it: he really enjoyed eating!

After I left for college, dad who was never a cook started competing in Texas-style, chili-making contests. I was surprised to learn about his new hobby, and don't know whether he actually won any prizes for his efforts, but it sure would have been a good time to witness his culinary exploits firsthand.

Our family, like many, had its' share of struggles. My parents divorced when I was in middle school and dad moved into an apartment. It makes me sad to think about him in that apartment by himself after living in our big house with swimming pool and expansive backyard. But like clock work, every Sunday evening at 5:00 dad would drive down the long driveway to pick me up for dinner and one of our lively discussions. We never deviated from where we ate; we went to the same Mexican food restaurant, El Chico, week after week. Dad ordered his favorite crispy tacos and always asked the waiter, "Can you bring an extra bowl of hot salsa." When the fried corn tortillas arrived piled high with spicy meat, tangy cheese and shredded lettuce, he immediately poured both bowls of hot sauce (the one that came with the order

and the extra) on his plateful of tacos, and with wide eyes dug in. Pure bliss is the best way to describe dad's experience of that meal!

My father was not particularly athletic (sorry dad!), I never saw him swim or ride a bike, but he did play a weekly, determined game of tennis. He was also a proficient ping-pong player (his daughters and grandsons share his love of ping-pong). After a sweaty, competitive game of tennis, dad liked to wear his tennis outfit for the rest of the day. I imagine he felt proud of his attractive sporty attire, which consisted of polo-style collared shirt, Bermuda-length shorts, lace-up shoes, and zip-front jacket—all pure white.

Growing up, I accompanied him to the tennis courts most weekends. Although I played some tennis, what I remember most was running up and down the huge multi-tiered bleachers where observers watched tennis matches. When I was tired and thirsty from the hot sun, I'd find the court where dad was playing and ask for money to buy a cool drink and ice cream at the pro shop. One of the things you could always count on dad for was having a pocket full of change. Whether in workday trousers or tennis whites his pockets were bulging—and when he wasn't using his hands for something else, he routinely had one of them in his pocket fiddling with those coins. Now I'm not a psychologist like my father, but maybe those silver disks reminded him how far he'd come in his life as a kid of immigrant parents who counted pennies, and was the first in his family to go to college, and become a world-class scientist. Maybe that's why he liked those heavy pockets. Or maybe he was just generous and wanted to be ready to buy someone a cool drink.

Champion of others is another character trait that describes my father. One story I enjoy telling is about watching the 1960s television series, "Perry Mason" with dad. He loved Raymond Burr in the title role of defense attorney proving "in the nick of time" his client's innocence to coincide with the end of each one-hour episode. At that point, dad would wildly and loudly cheer and clap his hands as Perry's interrogations revealed the true criminal. To this day I relish watching courtroom dramas on TV and in movies. The suspense and excitement I feel when justice prevails reminds me of dad rooting for Perry Mason.

In my conversations with Lolín and from reading testimonials written about my father, I learned he was undoubtedly a champion of his students both personally and professionally. Having spent his whole professional career at the UH, his passion for teaching and mentoring touched lives and launched careers.

During a visit to Houston over twenty years ago to attend a memorial service at the one-year anniversary of his death, I heard unexpected kind words about my father from a stranger. My husband and I were taking a walk in a residential neighborhood near the Museum of Fine Arts and Rice University. We stopped to say hello to an older woman watering her garden. When she asked where we were visiting from and we told her about attending dad's memorial service, the following words sprang from her mouth: "Well, everybody knows Dan Sheer!" She told us her husband, a psychologist, knew Dan Sheer and that Houston's academic community had the

utmost respect and admiration for my father. What a coincidence and nice thing for a daughter to hear.

Lastly, dad was sentimental. It's probably not a characteristic usually associated with research professors or academics. But my father was deeply emotional and he felt confident enough to expose that positive vulnerability with me. I hold dear a profound letter of his love that brought me to tears, one he wrote to me years ago after my parents divorce. And I cherish his tears of happiness, tears he couldn't hold back, when I asked to move into his new house with him when I was a 15-year-old teenager. My dad died way too young, he was only 69 years old, but my memories of our time together comfort me and I am grateful to have known the man who was my father.