

Matthew Kim(고 김정준 52) 딸의 Eulogy

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Thank you for coming. And I just want to start by saying that my father hated funerals.

My sister and I tried talking him into it. “How about a gathering?” “No. Maybe. Who?” “Y’know. Family. Friends.” “...no hymns.” “Okay... no hymns. How about music?” “... no. Maybe. No wreath.” “Okay.”

Part of it was that he couldn’t handle any display of weakness. For extended reasons including the fact he was Korean, my father hated crying, even when we were kids, even when we had, you know, reasons to cry. When my niece Evelyn was little, she was watching a Sesame Street special on 9/11 and how children deal with trauma. And my father pointed across the sitting room and yelled, “hey -- look at that little red guy! He’s crying!”

Yes – my father made fun of Elmo.

But I think the main reason my father hated funerals was that he had no use for self-seriousness, or proper faces, or stuffiness of any kind. Give him a party any day. On a moment’s notice -- literally -- he and my mother could pull together a New Year’s party for 75, host a household of overnight guests during a blizzard, or prep a formal dinner for 12. There was no problem too awful or achievement too dinky that wasn’t worth a trip to Arthur Avenue for imported bottarga and buffalo mozzarella and to Zachy’s for a new case of wine. He referred to Lidia Bastianich and Marcella Hazan and Julia Child by their first names, like they were old friends -- which I guess they kinda were. Once, my parents flew home from Europe -- and that evening, *with* jet lag, still managed to host a sit-down dinner for 8, with my father doing all of the cooking. Everyone came to their parties – I feel like thousands of people visited our house over the years. Once in NYC, I had a Korean cab driver and while we were chatting he spontaneously asked if I knew Dr. Matthew Kim of Port Chester and if I had ever been to his house.

Some random facts about my father:

- He wanted to be a fighter pilot
- He was out horseback riding the morning my sister was born.
- He could diagnose anything, even without looking, even over the phone.

- He walked faster than most people run.
- He whistled Rossini and Verdi during surgery.
- He had a crush on Rachel Maddow.
- He went to Venice 10 times and as far as he was concerned, that was just scratching the surface.

My father's life was shaped, profoundly, by art and music. He became a Christian because of the beauty of sacred music; he took the name Matthew after the oratorio by Bach; and when he tagged along with a friend to meet the famous lady novelist Kim Marl-Bong, he was greeted by her daughter – who became his wife and my mother. If God is the original creator, he is also the first artist, one who forged the world in order to please his eye. My father perceived this down to his bones. While he struggled, as we all do, with faith, his reverence for beauty – and the fact that he had really good taste – kept him moored in his belief that there was something bigger, something transcendent, that bound us all as human beings.

My mother, the daughter of a writer, was drawn to complex psychology in the books and movies she loved. My father adored stories, too, although his tastes were simpler. In our family, we always gave books and movies as gifts. But when I recommended *Don't Look Now* (Venice) – he said it was too scary. Or *The Talented Mr. Ripley* (beautiful location filming in Italy) – he found it too ugly. Don't even ask about *Burning* or *Parasite* – filmed in Korea, by Korean filmmakers.

But one movie that will always remind me of my father is *Babette's Feast*, the Danish film based on a Isak Dinesen story: in which a housekeeper takes all of her money to create a sumptuous feast for the elderly and pious sisters she works for. Even though the old ladies and their guests vow not to be swayed by the sinful pleasures of the table, they are gradually elevated by the meal – both spiritually and physically. And that is what today is, because that is how my father saw religion, and life, and art: as a celebration.

My father had his narratives – don't we all? -- and he clung to them. And yes, he softened and blurred the details over the years. I mean, he was a human being, with human flaws: He was stubborn. And he had a temper. And yet the stories he told about himself again and again gave him meaning, and happiness, and revealed who he was and how he saw his life. How his teachers opened his eyes to not just the Renaissance and Beethoven and the Impressionists, but to a world far beyond his tiny town in

North Korea. How tagging along to meet an esteemed writer led to marrying her daughter. How career and achievement and belongings really were secondary to the pleasures of being alive.

At the end of his life, I sat with my father and asked if he was thirsty and wanted more water. "No," he said as he gestured for me to stay. "Words are more precious."