

To My Dad

Eulogy for Prewitt Semmes

At 2:00 yesterday morning, I wrote this eulogy, but I cannot deliver it. My son, Jamie has offered to help.

For those of you who know me, you know that a loss of words is uncharacteristic, but how do I describe one of the most magnificent human beings I have ever known? My father was, quite simply, my hero and will remain so always.

One thing is for sure, if you are searching for the definition of a gentleman, you needn't look further than Prewitt Semmes. Proudly descended from Admiral Raphael Semmes, captain of the CSS Alabama, Dad paid just tribute to his heritage. He was always kind and compassionate, with consummate grace, elegance and good taste.

His character was as impeccable as his appearance. When Faith and I convinced him to go to AC/AC to exercise after recovering from his stroke, he showed up at the gym in his khaki pants and blue shirt, shedding his blazer just before climbing on the treadmill.

But, Dad was certainly not stuffy. He was **THE** most fun to take to parties, never forgetting his high-minded humor at home. And, of course, Dad will long be remembered for his martinis... I am sure many of you know that when he was preparing for the surgery to remove his melanoma in 1976, he felt compelled to calculate his alcoholic intake in advance. The unsuspecting anesthesiologist asked him if he drank and how much? Dad replied that yes, he did drink and that he had

had roughly thirty-five thousand forty martinis --- three a day since he was 17, not including **parties**, of course.

But, it was his mind that was so very brilliant - at once precise and imaginative. Faith and I looked forward just to talking to him, hearing his thoughts, experiencing the process of his thinking. His perspective was vast; his aesthetic sensibility acute and his knowledge of literature and history remarkable.

Dad had an abiding love for this little corner of the world. It lured him from Los Angeles back to Keswick, and his tireless efforts to preserve our precious countryside made a real difference. I remember when Disney's proposed "Americana" theme park was defeated in 1994. I was on business in Chile and I called him with a proud congratulations, knowing that he supported the Piedmont Environmental Council. I even forgave him when he said that "we needed to save the land **FROM** our children, not **FOR** our children..."

Dad loved animals - particularly dogs and birds - and, certainly, he loved us kids. I can remember only one time that he ever raised his voice. And, I also recall with vivid detail his penitent apology the following morning. He was mortified by his ever-so-slight transgression.

And, imagine Dad, a blithe 27 year-old, caring for his toddler Faith. To be honest, he wasn't much of a cook, but he changed the color of the scrambled eggs every day, just to keep things interesting. I am so very thankful that Dad was not fully aware of Faith's death; it would have broken his heart.

But, there is no one that Prewitt Semmes loved as he did my mother. He was her Prince Charming and she was his lady. Who would have thought that Ginny Scripps, the “little shrimp” from Detroit dancing school would have attained such stature?

Less than a month ago, when Mom was looking for Dad’s insurance card in his wallet, she discovered a black-and-white photo of herself, taken just after they were married at the Mocambo, a chic Hollywood nightclub. She was so glamorous and so gorgeous. And, I know that for 55 years, every time he looked at her, he still saw the same beautiful girl – his girl.

Theirs was a love that endured quite literally until his last breath. Mom asked the nurses to make room on “her side” of the hospital bed, and she hugged him tight, just as she always had. They are a shining example of true love – in sickness and in health, and I am so very grateful to have witnessed such a beautiful and abiding union.

So, I am now faced with the sheer inadequacy of words and I long for the aid and support of my dearest co-author, Faith. How do I capture the spirit of this thoroughly superb person? I can only hope that the essence of Prewitt Semmes is a bright light in all our hearts that is impossible to extinguish. I love you, Dad.

