Remembering Roy Huffington

Posted July 14, 2008 | 07:49 PM (EST)
On Friday, Roy Huffington, my former father-in-law, died at the age of 90 while vacationing in Venice, Italy. Since this site carries his last name, I want to take a moment to reflect on the man and his remarkable life.

Roy was born in Tomball, Texas and moved to Dallas during the Great Depression. He grew up in the oil fields of Venezuela before Roy was a teenager so, to help his mother and sister, he woke up at 4:30am to work on his two paper routes.

After earning his Ph.D. in geology from Harvard, he served as a naval officer aboard the aircraft carrier USS Hornet during WWII. Then, following a decade working as an oil company geologist, he went out on his own as a wildcatter in Houston. Huffington was an oilman when oil exploration was still a romantic endeavor.

Over the ensuing years, he built his company into a very successful international energy company. He eventually sold the firm when oil was $22 a barrel -- and devoted himself to philanthropy, served as U.S. Ambassador to Austria from 1990-1993.

I met him in 1985. And our friendship continued even when my marriage to his son ended. Whenever I was in Houston for a speech, I would give him a call and, if he was in town, we would get together for a drink. He often wasn't in town, because he remained to the end a passionate world traveler who had visited all seven continents, and whose adventurous spirit never waned.

My fondest memories of Roy center around his role as grandfather. He had always had his heart set on having a grandson. But when my first pregnancy resulted in a stillborn boy -- whom we had already decided to name Roy -- followed, he quickly realized they could be anything a grandson would be.

When our girls were little, I remember he used to patiently take them outside and teach them about the plants and the soil. He did this with such passion and depth of knowledge that, at one point or another, each of his granddaughters followed in his footsteps as a geologist.

They all eventually broke off from the geology track, but stayed close to him. And no matter where he went, distinctive handwriting would arrive in the mail for their birthdays - postmarked from faraway locations and bearing foreign stamps. The card always contained warm sentiments - and a little cash bonus for the girls.

The last time I saw Roy was in May, when he flew to LA -- at the age of 90 -- to attend our oldest daughter's high school graduation. I'll always remember the smile -- and the pride on his face -- as he watched her accept her diploma.

Newspaper obituaries will rightly remember the Golden Cross he received from the Republic of Austria for his service to the
country; his philanthropic work as long-time chairman of The Asia Society and The Salzburg Seminar; and the funding he provided (along with his beloved wife Phyllis) to establish the Huffington Center on Aging at Baylor College of Medicine, one of the world’s premiere centers on the study of aging.

I’ll remember those too. But mostly I’ll remember his kindness, his generosity, his integrity, and his humility. We will deeply miss him.

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I'm touched!

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Roy Huffington definitely sounds like a man whom I wish that I had met.
What a wonderfully remarkable person Roy Huffington must have been. What a true blessing to have lived through fearlessness, curiosity, and mentorship through the Depression and even his later years. His legacy to carry on and a great history to reflect on. There is nothing more beautiful than witnessing a grandparent with their grandchildren sharing time together. It is the true definition of “quality time” Even the memory of it is beautiful and unforgotten.

Thank you for telling us his story.

A beautiful tribute Arianna.

Thank you for sharing this, and our thoughts and prayers are with you and your family.

Shalom

Dear Arianna,

Thank you for sharing Roy with us; what a fine man.

My condolences to you and your family.

Roy Huffington was a great man judging from that wonderful tribute paid to him in the article. I am sure Roy was proud to have you as a daughter-in-law, and to know that you will carry the baton well in his continuing legacy.

My condolences to the entire Huffington family. While posted in the Far East, in the '70s, my oil company was often guests of Roy and his wife in Jakarta and Singapore. You couldn't have asked for better company! Roy had a lifetime of stories to tell, and we were just a young couple at the time but he took the trouble to get to know us and included us in his invitations whenever he was near. He was a joy to be around and we held him in great esteem. I was very sorry to hear of his passing. He will be missed by so many.

Dear Arianna,

I don't think many people realize the solid family values foundation with which you have raised your daughters. Thank you for sharing this.

A grandfather is a wonderful thing.

My condolences to you and your daughters on this loss.
Condolences to you and your family.

Your article made me cry, Arianna. Your relationship with this man was a tribute to you as well. A lovely tribute. My condolences, Arianna.

psgoodguy...I hope you don't mind that I am posting my condolences to Arianna as a reply to your post. The 'Post a Comment' tab is not working. Dear Arianna, as a regular poster to this site, I want to let you know that this was a warm and beautiful tribute to your former father-in-law. You, your former husband and your daughters will be comforted by the love Mr. Huffington had for his family. He seems to have been a wonderful man.

Dear Arianna,

I would like to extend my sincere condolences to you on the passing of Mr. Huffington. I read at wasn't sure of the familial connection albeit the surname.

I hope good memories will make this time less difficult to traverse. You have carried his name with accomplishing so much.

You and your family will be in my prayers.

Dear Arianna,

Thank you for sharing your memories with us, the readers of Huffington Post. And, my condolences to you and your daughters on this loss.

Arianna, thanks for sharing Roy's legacy with us. Next to losing my father, the passing of my fat moment in my life. Deepest condolences.
Dear Arianna, I was so sorry to read of the passing of your father-in-law. Having lost my dad years ago at an early age I know the feeling of loss when you loose someone that not only you love, but has also had a presence in your life. Your, your daughters, your former husband, and the family and friends of your father-in-law that will surely miss him. You do his name proud. With warmest regards, Ida

Nice piece, Arianna. I, too, maintained a healthy, loving relationship with my father-in-law after my marriage ended. He and I would talk every week about the regular conversations between Bob Edwards and Red Barber. When Barber had died, I had to pull off the road and cry, because he was my last living link with Herbie years later.

Dear Arianna:

My condolences for the loss of your father-in-law. It's a confusing set of emotions to miss someone deeply, all the while knowing that the life they lived was honorable and full, and ended the way they lived. Bittersweet.

I didn't know you had a stillbirth... my first pregnancy was a stillbirth boy. And my fourth was a stillborn girl. Very different situations, very different reasons, but the same outcome... I am writing a book about my birthing experiences. Stillbirths are something unique. It's not like an early pregnancy miscarriage and it's not like losing a live child. It's is something different. It's terrible, no question about it, and there are no good words to describe it. One thing these experiences have taught me about cherishing my children and valuing each minute I have with them.

Thank you for your work, and your words. Someday I would love to talk with you about our shared experiences.

Arianna:

My deepest sympathy for your loss.

It was interesting to learn that Roy served aboard the Hornet, as I served as a docent aboard her historical landmark and museum ship in Alameda, California).

Arianna,

So very sorry to hear of the passing of your former Father-in-Law. You are doing a magnificent started. He must have been a true inspiration to many. My sincerest condolences.
Thanks for the story, that we should get to know him a little. You and your family are lucky to have known him well.

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You are a very fine lady, Arianna, to maintain contact and a positive relationship with your former father-in-law to you and to your daughters for your loss.

- Janet Carter See Profile I'm a Fan of Janet Carter

Arianna: You have recreated for us the remarkable man who was your former father-in-law and four daughters. Your words are eloquent testament to your love and respect and may they abide over the years to come. Take comfort in knowing that his was a full life, well and productively lived and enhanced by his pride in all of you. RIP Roy Huffington.

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RIP, sir. May your decency continue to spread.

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My condolences to you and your daughters. I feel your grief because, I lost my husband of 40 y extremely hard on your daughters more than you can imagine because, I see how it affects my can give you is to remind them of him every opportunity you have, go over pictures of him with I over their grief.. I myself is getting over my grief, by posting on HuffPo, so in a way I am getting and you will be in my prayer...

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My thoughts are with you, and your family.

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Deepest condolences on your loss.
Thank you for sharing your memories.

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