

Ramon A. Klitzke II

Remembering Professor Klitzke

Ramon Klitzke, professor emeritus, passed away last semester, at age 90. His longtime service on the Marquette Law School faculty, as well as his life story more generally, should be memorialized. Toward that end, we print here one of the eulogies given at his funeral service at St. John's Lutheran Church, in Brookfield, Wis., on April 5, 2019. This one was from his son, Ramon Klitzke II, a Marquette lawyer, class of 1980, and now a patent lawyer in Portland, Ore.

On behalf of my mom, Doris Klitzke, and the rest of the family, we thank you all for coming today to help us remember and celebrate my dad's life. So many of you have done so much to support my mom and dad these past few years. It was comforting for Ann, Al, and me to know that our parents had an extended family of friends to provide support here in Waukesha the last few years.

My dad was a remarkable man, who achieved far more than anyone could have expected. Born in 1928, he was adopted as an infant in Chicago by Hugo and Ethyl Klitzke. They named him "Ramon," spelled unconventionally, after Ramon Novarro, a Mexican-born silent film star in the 1920s, whom the movie studio promoted as "The Latin Lover." I have a feeling that it was my grandmother, Ethyl, who chose the name.

My grandfather, Hugo, was a meat cutter in the Chicago meatpacking industry. He put his long johns on every day and spent most of his day in the freezer, butchering beef. Ethyl was a part-time telephone operator. Hugo

and Ethyl lived in a modest blue-collar neighborhood, hardly on the nice side of the tracks.

Growing up, my dad experienced the rougher side of Chicago. As a teenager, he worked as a stock boy in a liquor store that was robbed at gunpoint, and he witnessed the owner of the store pistol-whipped after trying to kill the lights to thwart the robbery. Dad set pins at a bowling alley frequented by hard-drinking drunkards who backed down to nobody; he found one of them dead in the back alley one night when he went to empty the trash. At his high school, it was necessary for boys to pledge fealty to one of the local gangs to survive. When he couldn't avoid participating in the gang's periodic rumbles with other gangs, he would try to hang around on the fringe of the melee and away from the "real action." Though disquieting to say the least, this was his Chicago in the 1940s.

Yet Dad still managed to stay mostly out of trouble in high school because he was an excellent athlete in several sports, including being quarterback of the football team and diving on the swim team. At this point in his life and with parents of modest means, he wasn't exactly on a college track.

Lucky for my dad, a college diving coach at Illinois Institute of Technology convinced him to attend. While there, my dad became president of the junior class and captain of the swimming team, graduating with a bachelor's of science degree in engineering. After college, he served in the army during the Korean War, worked as a safety engineer in Indiana to pay off his college scholarship, dove for the Indianapolis



Professor Ramon Klitzke

Athletic Club, and went to law school in the evening at Indiana University while working full time during the day.

At the athletic club in Indianapolis, he met the love of his life, my mother, who was a star swimmer from Michigan and an even more accomplished athlete than my dad. She caught his attention because, when swimming training laps in the pool, she would stop and wait for him to complete his dive. Logical minds might surmise that her interest was more about self-preservation and avoiding one of the divers landing on her from above.

Mom and Dad married in Indianapolis and, after Dad's graduation from law school, moved to New York City. There, Dad worked as a patent attorney for Union Carbide by day and ambitiously

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pursued his master of law degree at New York University School of Law in the evening. And, of course, he continued to compete in diving. With two rambunctious small boys (mostly my brother, Al, I'm sure), my mother somehow managed to survive the Big Apple while Dad was patent lawyering, studying for law degree number two, and diving.

Dad graduated from NYU with his LL.M. degree and accepted a position as a law professor at Texas Southern University in Houston. Seven years later, he came to Marquette University, where he became a tenured law professor for almost 30 years and, upon retiring, was honored with the status of "professor emeritus."

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Dad loved and cherished his family. He loved teaching primarily because he enjoyed the engaging academic interactions with his law students, but he also appreciated the flexibility he had in the summer to travel and spend time with family. He said many times how my mother was the best thing that ever happened to him. Dad would say that they made a great team. He also was incredibly proud not only of my mother's many swimming and other accomplishments but also the accomplishments of his grandchildren, Michael, Julia, Joanna, Alyssa, and Connor.

Dad not only wrote many scholarly articles about many legal topics, relied upon by the Federal Circuit, for example, but in retirement he also wrote many short stories and poems. Many were inspired by his life experiences, and he even managed to win a few local and state awards for his writings.

Dad loved nature—perhaps his deep appreciation came from his upbringing in the asphalt world of Chicago. Many of his stories and poems feature pine trees, mountains, flowers, lakes, and wildlife. He was most at peace at my parents'

cabin in northern Wisconsin. I see vividly the same passion for nature and outdoors shared by his grandchildren in their lives.

Although it is not about nature, I want to close by reading one of his poems, from 1997, called "Year's Closeout."

Maybe Dad's poem is a message for all of us. Dad has reached his "year's end." But for the rest of us, we are starting a new year, with an opportunity to look forward and not behind us, and a chance to "balance life's books." ■

YEAR'S CLOSEOUT

Bookkeeper Time
closes the account.
Too late now
to correct mistakes
rectify oversights
snatch back blunders.

Better to plan
for challenges
opportunities
openings.

Better to look
ahead than back.

The year's end
is a year's beginning,
a fresh year of days,
a new inventory of hours.
Another chance
to balance life's books.