

Jim Brooks

The Importance of Family

My Dad passed away recently at the age of 95. A depression era child, he grew up the oldest son of five siblings. One thing that sticks out for me was his dedication to his family. Over the years, I have come to understand its importance for me.

Dad became the breadwinner of the family at 18 when his father died unexpectedly. While others went to college after high school, Dad worked to support the family. He was fond of saying, "After high school my friends went to college. I went to work and opened a bank account."

My father stayed close to his immediate family his entire life. He was always there, both personally and financially, to help them when they were in need. While I was growing up, we always made the drive to Pittsburgh to attend the annual family gathering. Until my uncle died in 1998, he even attended his high school reunions in Pittsburgh. Despite his success, he never forgot his roots.

Growing up in poverty, my Dad was determined to make sure that his own family would not do without. His children would have the opportunity he didn't have to attend college and pursue professional careers. In the early days, Dad wouldn't come home until he made a sale so that there would be bread on the table.

In the spring of 1975, Dad gave me a call. I was working as a petroleum geologist in Anchorage, Alaska. Dad owned a farm in Ohio and he had been approached by an oil company to drill an exploratory well on his property. I asked him to send me the well logs from the surrounding area and, after examining them, I suggested he participate in the drilling of the well. Soon we were all receiving royalty checks in the mail. Dad wanted to make sure that the family would use the money wisely so we agreed to pool our resources and buy rental property. My brother agreed to manage the units and eventually made a successful living managing our buildings and those of Dad's friends.

Dad thought it was important that we owned and made decisions about the properties together to ensure that my brother, sister and I would work together and learn to rely on each other as a family. While there were some difficult moments that at times required courageous conversations on our part to work out problems, overall my Dad's scheme to bring us together worked very well. We stayed together as a family and in the last 10 years when Dad needed our help we all shared in the responsibility for his care. His passing has been difficult for all of us. However, we are all proud that we have continued the legacy of the importance of family that was so much a part of our Dad.