



Robert Lee Wood

born: 6/12/1931

died: 1/26/2018

Where to begin. I guess World War II. Dad was just a kid. The world was simpler. Black and white. No smart phones or driverless cars or “Breaking News” on CNN. Just baseball. And bicycles. He talked a lot about those times. The nickel that got you inside the Orphuem for all day Westerns. The rubber drives. Big band music. And all the folks spilling out of Stimaks onto the corner of Vine and Mill on VE Day.

Raised in a tiny single story home on the East Side of Kalamazoo, Dad adored his mom; Dorothy was gentle. She absolutely loved animals; something that was central to her son his entire life. He respected his dad. Lloyd Wood, “Woody” worked long hours at Ingersoll’s

during the War, managing the assembling of landing craft that ended up on beaches in the South Pacific. Everybody sacrificed for the war effort. Dad included. Gladly.

“Red” Wood was a 1949 graduate

of University “State High”.

While State High was where WMU students got their practice teaching hours, prepping Kalamazoo’s upper crust for university, anybody was welcomed to attend. “Red” and his best friend Roger Bennett took the city bus daily to the hill on Western’s East Campus.

Dad loved high school, and shared stories of those times often with Amy and me in his booth at Theo and Stacy’s. In addition to young and inspiring instructors from the teaching college, State High athletes got to use all of Western’s sports facilities. Pretty cool stuff for a kid from the East Side. And while athletics served at the fulcrum, it was all good - classmates, art and social studies classes, school dances, sliding down the hill on cafeteria trays in the Winter, playing ball on Hyames Field in the Spring. He’d talk of teammates and coaches, and sometimes games,

never ever his own exploits. I figured he must’ve been pretty good and found Kalamazoo Gazette microfilm confirmation down at the Library; he wasn’t impressed. A three sporter, baseball was his forte’; third base his home. And I am absolutely sure the kid was as “no nonsense” on the football field and the ball diamond, as he would be years later, filling out the line-up card in the dug out.

A Staff Sergeant at Randolph Air Force base in San Antonio, during the Korean War, Staff Sergeant Wood fit in well. The military was ordered. Dad liked routine, as well as the softball team and the base golf course and the guys. He said more than once that he would have been fine with the Air Force as a career. But he fell in love and he got married to Mom. Constance Anne Hutchins and Robert L. Wood were married in Kalamazoo in 1954 and for a year or two lived off base in Texas, their first and only stay outside of West Michigan.

After his time was up, they came home and began a life (our life - with Amy and me and Andy) together at 2829 Fulford Street in Kalamazoo, in the old grey house that served as a base of operations for a middle class family - in a middle class time - in a middle class world. You could not have asked for more ... a more loving and supportive mother and father. A refrigerator with more food. Or a more central location to the things that mattered. Greenwood School,

two blocks north, was an easy walk for little legs from Kindergarten to third grade. Milwood Elementary stood five blocks West - a six and a half minute bike ride if you were flying. And three short streets behind us was the Junior High. All we did was walk, ride bikes, and play ball. Life was pretty good.

That kind of middle class security, mom at home - cooking and cleaning and washing and driving us all over our world - took a steady job. One with Union wages. Dad treasured his 35 years at General Motors. Work was never a chore...and the fellas that he spent those 40 to 60 hours a week with, on the door line, or the paint crew, on the golf course, those were his guys. The experience of hard work - the pleasure of dedication to the job, whatever the job, the relationships that spun from those experiences, were central to my father's core

Dad coached Little League. Andy and me. Best coach I've ever known. I watched him earn respect from kids who others saw as too rebellious and from parents who trusted him with their most prized possession. He knew the game; no doubt about that. But his strength as a coach was tied up in his character as a man. Things weren't complicated with Coach Wood. No separate rules for individuals on a team. Didn't matter if you hit .420 or .240, you were on-time for practice, you ran out every single ground ball, and

you never made excuses; or you sat. That resonated with young guys - some who needed the structure on the ball diamond that they didn't find at home. And that was maybe the key to who my Dad was.... He was simple - in a good way - a black and white - a right and wrong way. He always ran out ground balls. Forty hours of work for forty hours pay. And he told the truth. No shades. There isn't a day goes by in my high school classroom, when something comes up, that I don't think how would my Little League coach have handled that.

But there was so much more to Coach than baseball. Whether it was perched alongside on a plastic chair watching him clean rabbits in the cold November garage, or welcoming the Spring, Amy found a common bond with Dad in nature. Every May they strolled the neighborhood seeking out Magnolia Tree blossoms, lingering in the warm spring sunshine just looking and walking and pointing. Not a lot of talk; Dad wasn't a talker, rather a smile and a nod and a hug, he had a soft strong presence. Stoic as a coach, and at the dinner table, he was anything but with Andy, turtling out at the Millpond. An old green aluminum boat leaned up against the garage it seemed like forever. They would drag that thing into the pick up truck, head out to the water, and scoop scoop scoop til they landed dozens of turtles - and then just before they headed home to

shore, flip the net and all the turtles to freedom.

He and Mom partnered in sculpting gardens their entire 58 years of marriage, planting and shaping and weeding beautiful patches of flowers, surrounded by meandering paths, brick patios, fountains, and hidden fish ponds. Together they fashioned a home and cottage that flowed with color and life. And love.

And all of us followed Dad into the countryside on late Fall Sunday afternoons. We would pull on our sweatshirts and pile into the white Dodge station wagon. Instead of rabbits, we hunted walnuts. We'd walk and talk and run and play, and load green sticky walnuts into big bushel baskets. When we got home we dragged 'em down into the basement. All Winter long, Dad would crack 'em and we'd run 'em out to feeders to keep our squirrels fat and happy til Spring time came again.

I think my dad liked dogs more than he liked people. His mom loved dogs. They owned a few, that she and he took care of, some for hunting, some for loving. And then there were ours. Precious guided us through our younger years. Jenny, a sweet yellow lab, was Dad's partner out at the Gilkey Lake cottage. They laid brick together. Built decks together. Planted gardens together and took rides all over Barry County. Jenny passed a month or two before Mom. Those were some tuff times. We weren't sure how Dad would survive

without Mom *and* Jenny. You know though, in the end, he did OK. Theo and Stacy's and Charlie (a big ole lazy husky) and of course Bella picked up the slack.

After Charlie passed we all kind of thought that Dad might finish his time, just he and the cats, on Miles Avenue. And then two years ago at an animal rescue shelter in Muskegon, curled quietly at the back of a cage while the rest of the place erupted in yipping and yapping, I discovered Bella. What a lovely soul she is. Bella slid right onto the sofa alongside Sarah and Ollie (the cats) and Dad and provided so much love those last two years.

A Blue Tick hound.. who could leap like an African Gazelle when she joined Dad, put on twelve quick pounds in three months and settled into a quiet and comfortable retirement. Dad and Bella ate cheese popcorn together and watched the Western Channel. They, he in the old Lazy Boy littered with cigarette burns, and Bella stretched out on the couch, suffered through many a Detroit Tiger loss. He chauffeured Bella about Kalamazoo. Three stops on a regular basis - Hardings to pick up dog food, Sweetwater's Donuts- a daily cup of coffee, a chat with the young folks at the counter, and two donut holes - one for him and one for Bella out in the Orange Truck, and always every night he came home from Theo and Stacy's with two sausage patties to go. When the

new I-pad touch screen menus came out at Theo and Stacy's, George put "Mr. Bob's sausage patties" on the screen.

Theo and Stacy's, George and Phyllis and all the gals, took care of my dad for five years. As much as anybody else, they provided a richness to his life after Mom passed ,that made getting up and facing every day, worthwhile. Every single night - same booth - between three thirty and four thirty - whiskey sour and the Special. Or maybe a Saturday Night burger and home fries. Or an occasional Western Omelette. A cup of coffee. And a large water. You guys - all of you - loved my Dad. And he loved you. Your compassion and attention, your respect for him, and service every single night of the week for five years, you guys rate right up there with Bella :).

Thank you for loving our father as much as you love your own.

Robert Lee Wood was a good man. He was honest and humble and hard working. His spirit will linger in many places, with many people. On April 14 from 3:00 to 6:00 PM we will celebrate his life at Theo and Stacy's on Portage Street. Hors d'oeuvres, Desserts,

and Whiskey Sour Punch alongside the Ray Anthony Orchestra. Whether you knew him as Coach Wood, Bob or Mr. Bob, "Red", Robert, or Staff Sergeant Wood, or just plain Dad - doesn't matter. Please join us.

We will surely miss him; but we will always remember. And my guess is that his spirit will visit that front booth at Theo Stacy's on a pretty regular basis between 3:30 and 4:30 PM most days of the week, most weeks of the year, for a long long time to come.

**See you at Theo and Stacy's
3:00 to 6:00 PM on Saturday
April 14th.**

Bella will be in attendance.

