

**Isadore Alpert (1910-2006) - EULOGY**  
**presented by Mark Alpert at his father's memorial service**

When my mom asked me to say a few words about my dad, I was hesitant.

OK, one reason is that as a college professor, it is difficult to talk for less than 75 minutes about anything, as my friends and family know excruciatingly well.

But the major difficulty for me is that it is hard to say in a few words something that is worthy of my father.

You are here because you knew him, and we are grateful for your support. Some of you knew him well, and certainly you have known him differently as a friend than we, his children, did as a father.

So I asked myself, "What would this man who talked enthusiastically about others' accomplishments, but never about his own, what might he appreciate my sharing with you in memory of him?"

The answer is, "I don't know." But I shall try to share with you a few impressions of Dad, among the many that will stay with me, and perhaps with you.

1. Some of my earliest impressions are the ones that kids will get of their parents. Dad cooking eggs in the kitchen.

When he learned that I didn't like eggs, he didn't make me eat them.

Instead, he experimented to try to find a version I would eat. We both discovered that I disliked fried eggs ("sunny side up" or "down"). I think the problem then was I didn't like the runny yolk. But when he made scrambled eggs with Lawry's seasoned salt, they tasted like something else, and I liked them.

Now you're probably wondering why in this cholesterol-challenged era I chose this memory.

Well part of it is that my dad liked simple foods, and disliked mysteries. He and mom ate moderate amounts of eggs, meat, whole milk, real butter (whose taste my generation can barely recognize), and lived clean, wholesome lives into their 90s.

But the other part is that he was the kind of dad who rarely forced his kids to do or not do anything. If he thought about how their experience of life might be changed, he would think of it as a puzzle to be solved, with something that might work. And this is the advice he would share.

I can imagine that you, his friends, have received a number of tips from him over the years about things he had learned that made some part of life easier, or more fun.

If you've read *The Tipping Point*, it should be obvious to you that Dad was my original market maven.

2. Second, dad worked hard all his life to make his families lives as different as possible from the hardships he endured as a child.

When I learned that his father had retired at 40, I asked dad how his dad had been so successful that he could afford to do so. He said, "He wasn't; he just quit work, and it was up to the kids to earn money to support the family."

I learned that he idolized his older brother, Morris, who was a boxer (as many Jews were then, and African-Americans and Hispanics are now it has long been a way for poor kids to make a living, but a hard one).

Morris taught him the essentials of boxing, which dad said he needed. Because if you wanted to sell newspapers in a good street location, you had to be able to defend your corner.

I cannot imagine a harder time for my dad than the time he was called to bring home his brother's body, which he saw laid out on a slab of concrete. Morris had suffered appendicitis, possibly brought on by and confused with the pain of too many body blows in the ring. He died when he was 30, and my dad, his younger brother who had traveled with him, and who learned so much from him, had to make the journey to bring his body home.

He rarely spoke about Morris, but he picked up the yoke of family responsibility. He provided substantial financial support to his surviving younger brother, his parents, and his sisters, for a long time.

It was as natural to him as breathing.

3. I must say that this "Dickensian" childhood was not all bad. Dad learned to play pool well enough to get lunch money (and maybe more). He said you had to find a "mark" who thought he could beat you. If you won, you ate; if you lost, you didn't. He was a very good pool player.

But he hated gambling, and told me never to do it. To this day I don't play poker or any other card games for money. He said, "If you play with your enemies, they will cheat you. If you play with your friends, whether you win or lose, you lose your friends. If you lose, they'll seem like gloating winners. If you win, they'll resent you."

One of his first successful businesses was the "coin machine" business. He had pinball machines (which I later loved playing, much to the frustration of the mechanics who were trying to fix them). He also had slot machines when they were legal in Minnesota, juke boxes, and all kinds of "entertainment" machines.

He disliked the gambling machines and always thought they were parasitic, taking advantage of people's addiction to waste time and money in pursuit of winnings.

This led to two interesting things:

A. When Luthor Youngdall won Minnesota's governorship, he fulfilled a campaign promise to clean up gambling, and made slot machines illegal. My dad lost a lot of money on machines that were now nearly worthless.

But dad said that "he did the right thing."

Dad told me this as a teenager, and I didn't know until much later how rare it was for someone to willingly give up money if the principle was right.

He was honest. He didn't know any other way to talk, or to be.

I didn't know how rare it was for people to like others for who they are, not what they are, and what they can do for you.

B. He started the first discount house in northern Minnesota, in the early 1950s. Business was his fascination. Mom would say "he was married to his business."

He had read about the success of E.J. Korvette, which sold discounted toasters, frying pans, and lots of other items after World War II, without the high overhead expenses of traditional retail stores.

Well, he was buying similar items as prizes for people to win if they got enough points playing vending machines (or when they were legal, "punch boards" where you bought the chance to push through a slot and get the points, kind of like today's "scratch-off" games at McDonalds).

He decided to take the front part of his coin machine repair facility and convert it to a small showroom, where he sold the same items at discount prices, say \$17.95 for a \$25 Sunbeam electric frying pan, or a rod & reel for 40% off.

Very soon, people were flocking to what became "Twin Ports Sales Company." He built a larger store on Lake Avenue, and expanded it several times. That's where I started working as a child, and where I learned to like selling, if the products were good and the prices were a good value.

But he fought his desire to have me continue in his business, which was an extraordinarily unselfish act. He always thought that he was in business because he couldn't go to college, but he respected professionals who were doctors and lawyers (he would have been a great lawyer).

So he told me to "carry your inventory in a briefcase," and I do.

But when I teach my students about marketing, I want them to be like my father.