

Eulogy for Earl Busby

John VanDenBerg

My name is John VanDenBerg, I am Earl's first cousin and live in Paonia. I am honored that Katy asked me to give the eulogy for Earl.

Earl's grandmother Horton on the Busby side came to Colorado prior to statehood, which made the family a Pioneer family. Earl was born in Crawford in 1932. His Dad, Earl, Sr. was quite a guy. Not too tall, tough as nails, and an incredibly hard worker. *How many of you in this room had met Earl, Sr.?* He had a very dry sense of humor, and definitely knew the fine art of ranching.

His Mom, Tracy, was the first born out of 10 children, and baked the best bread you ever had. I have a bit of that bread and butter right here! (patting stomach). Tracy was a champion quilter, she taught Katy how to quilt, and led weekly quilting bees. Earl told me about the early years of growing up on their small ranch. The notion of living in poverty is something we have all heard a lot about, but like some of you in the room, Earl's family lived it. He told me that there were many months when they did not have any cash of any kind, not even a dime. At the rented family home which was above Crawford, Earl and his sister Leilah slept in a room with a dirt floor and often woke to snow having blown in through holes in the walls. But, with hard work, selling milk and eggs, raising a huge garden and lots of canning, they had plenty to eat. Earl learned to work and save and be thrifty. As a teen, he was a great baseball player and overall athlete.

Earl was blessed with lots of cousins, including Bill Shaw on the Busby side. Earl Sr. would drop the young boys off in the mountains, where they would hunt and fish for up to a week. A number of the VanDenBerg cousins were close in age to Earl and grew up together during the Depression and afterwards. My cousin Ted, just seven months younger than Earl, told about one memorable trip being back in Curecanti fishing and hunting with his brother Bud and Earl, and our Uncle John. Both Earl and Bud each shot a bighorn ram, and packed them out. Uncle John was scared to death the game warden Art Rogers would catch them. When Earl Sr. saw the illegal big horn sheep his son had shot, he turned white and took the head out in the field and buried it deep! *Don't worry about my telling on you, Bud, I think the statute of limitations is up on that one!*

Earl was a very smart guy, but his education was cut short. He was caught smoking in the school, and when the principal told him to sit still and take a paddle, Earl refused. The principal grabbed Earl, which was a mistake. Like his Dad, Earl was one tough guy, and the principal ended up getting the worse of the encounter. Earl, Sr. told him he did not have to go back to school. At age 14 he started working in Mr. Conklin's sawmill camps on Black Mesa, holding his own with adult men.

As the Korean War began to take off, Earl enlisted in the Air Force and served as a sergeant, working as a cook on a base in Denver. When he was discharged, he began to work in many different jobs, but gravitated to welding. Earl went to welding school, became a master welder and made this his career, having the unique ability to weld almost any metal with a machinist's precision. Even in his last months, people would bring him welding jobs no one else could handle, he loved the challenge of seeing if he could build it or weld it. He taught many people how to weld, including my older daughter, Rain. Rain reminisced to me about learning how to weld from Earl. He shared stories of his early welding days, and how WWII created a generation of women welders and shifted thinking about what women could and couldn't do well.

Earl had four children with his first wife. For many reasons we won't go into here, he lost touch with them. He told me that this was the biggest mistake of his life, and it was something he always carried with him. Over the last few years, he re-established relationships with his son Ernie and with two of his granddaughters, one of whom is here today.

Fifty-five years ago, Earl married Katy. One day he and I were talking about the first moments when we met our wives. He told me that Katy walked into a room at work with a group of women, he spotted her, and the hair stood up on his head, back when he had hair! They partnered together for many decades, including lots of mutual work with others, making the Hotchkiss Kiwanis into a thriving organization, which helped hundreds of youth through scholarships.

Like many men of his generation, Earl was not overly demonstrative with his affections, I think the kids call it PDA, or Public Displays of Affection. I always teased him about maybe becoming more romantic! Several years ago, when he was speaking at a Historical Society meeting, he began his talk by asking Katy to stand

and then he introduced her to the audience, and mentioned their coming anniversary, a very touching moment. I was sitting next to my cousin Bud at the meeting, and whispered to Bud “I didn’t think he had that in him”. He did love his Katy!

Earl and I spent a lot of time talking on the phone. Recently, he and I have worked on squash bug remedies – he called me twice the day before he died to report “no squash bugs!”. I know Earl would want you to know the secret – 1 gallon of water, 1 cup of compost tea, one ounce of unsulfured molasses, spray all sides of plant and the soil!

He was always ready to try new things, new techniques, learn new skills. Like his dad, he was one of the hardest working people I ever met. For example, in his early fifties, he and Katy owned a liquor store in Hotchkiss at the time when the mines closed. Money and customers dried up, and it ended up that to keep what he and Katy had, he had to earn some extra money fast. He and our friend Glen Miles joined a crew building towers of all types, microwave towers, guy wire towers, some up to 750 feet tall, booming all over the central part of the US. Glen and the other two workers were a couple of decades younger, but Glen said Earl worked side by side with them doing brutally hard work in the heat and cold. They drove an old oil field truck with two bucket seats, and all four of them squeezed in. Glen said the beat-up truck would break down, and they would pull over, grab tools and fix it and keep driving. They would put up towers, bolting, welding and climbing. Sleeping four to a hotel room, they saved money and spent almost a year on the road. On the photo board in the back, there is a photo of one of them half way up a huge tower – Glen said it was a very dangerous job. At the end of it, Earl had earned the money he needed and came out on top.

Earl delighted in his and Katy’s children, Jack and Linda. He bragged on his daughter Linda and always said about Jim McChesney, Linda’s husband, that he was more of a son than a son-in-law. He loved their son Jack and his grandchildren, Jennifer, Aaron, Tara, Melissa, and David. He adored his great grandchildren Joe, Zach, Alli, Victoria, Dawson, Daaron, and Aidan.

I am going to close by reading what his grandson David wrote:

“It was 35 years ago that I first set foot into this building. I was 10 years old and I had just broken my leg. The Elks had a large collection of crutches that they offered for donation and I had come here to pick a pair of crutches out. I remember being scared and not knowing what the coming days would have in store for me. As I tried out different size crutches, I realized that I would have to re-learn how to walk with them.

It is fateful that I am here today in much the same situation. Wondering what the coming days have in store for my loved ones and myself. These days will be tough on those who were fortunate to know Earl. He was truly a very special man. Without Earl in this world, it is as if I am learning to walk again, without his knowledge, love and advice only a phone call away. However this time, I am not scared like the child I once was, for Earl left behind a bond of love and support which we will all draw from as we support each other. In the spirit of Earl’s unceasing duty and love for his community, let us continue join together and help each other out, especially my grandmother Katy who is an equally special person. Earl will be missed but never forgotten.”

Thank you, and thanks to the Elk Lodge.