



[Mark Dias · Tuesday, December 29, 2015](#)

## The Death of a Great Man

Two years ago today - This is the story I wrote of those days leading up to my father's death



My dad, Arthur James Dias in the Center, sister Bee, to the right and friend Gloria to the left, taken at El Kona club in El Cerrito circa 1943

The Last Days of Arthur James Dias (1920-2013)

Dad was flying in from San Antonio, Texas to Sacramento, California after attending his son Bryan's wedding and visiting his other son Greg and daughter-in-law Demcy accompanied by his daughter Dorothy. Dorothy was dad's travel companion whose job was to make sure dad was comfortable and relaxed throughout his stay in the Lone Star state. Dad was used to traveling during his golden years. In 2011, he had visited his children in Oregon, Colorado and Washington and he was not a neophyte when it came to air travel. Aileen, always looking out for dad's best interest, wanted to make sure he was making the most out of his elderly years, and in 2013 Bryan his son, like any son, wanted his father to witness his wedding in Texas and meet his new bride Jennifer, "Dad needs to be at my wedding" he would say, and Greg who also lived in Texas, albeit three hours away from Bryan wanted to see him too. Dad's itinerary included Bryan's wedding in Granbury, Texas and then traveling the 270 miles with Dorothy, her husband Milo and their children to San Antonio to visit his other son Greg. It was an exhausting trip. Upon his return, Aileen his daughter, the 12th child of 14, with whom he was living came to pick him up. She noticed something different about his demeanor this time when he disembarked from the airplane. He needed more help than usual. He stumbled clumsily as he approached her, grasping the rickety wheelchair so as not to fall. He appeared weak, frail and gaunt, not the man who just a few weeks prior would leave a seemingly healthy nonagenarian. There was a palpable feeling of unease as Aileen approached her father. As usual, she gave him a hug and put her arms around him grasping his neck, kissing him on the cheek. A month before departure, Aileen purchased the ticket to Texas. She clicked on the prompt "buy" noticing the banner that said, "no refunds once ticket is purchased," Dad suddenly looked up at her and said in

his usual calm voice, "Why am I going to Texas again?". He didn't seem as eager to go this time around. "What?, Now you tell me." She replied. In retrospect, dad didn't really want to go - He wasn't up to it. The person whom we thought was always immortal was not as invincible as we had once thought. He went to please his children. This trip would prove to be "His Last Hoorah."

Jeanine and I also attended Bryan and Jennifer's wedding. It took place November 23, 2013 in Granbury, a small town outside of Fort Worth, Texas in a small ma and pa rustic backwoods winery called "Barking Rocks." There were a few benches and a small number of tables and chairs, otherwise it was standing-room only. The top of the ceiling was covered with what seemed to be some sort of tin roof. The inside of the winery was small and quaint, with lights dimly lit, guests chattering in small circles with friends and relatives they seemed to know. Bryan's children played huddled in a small corner dressed to the nines. The ceremony was to take place on top of an old crate with a cardboard box covering next to an old wine barrel that gave the place its countrified appeal. The homey atmosphere added to the ambiance for the small wedding they were to have. This was to be a joyous occasion. Bryan and Jennifer would say their vows accompanied by their children and parents who attended. Raeann, my daughter was sitting next to my father. She asked him knowing in advance what his response would be, "How do you like the wedding?" Dad, who was used to the traditional Catholic wedding looked at her with his usual sardonic smile said, "I don't."

We would have accompanied dad, but dad was going to visit Greg and to do so would have required him to travel the extra three hours to San Antonio Texas, and Jeanine could not afford to take the extra time off from work so Dorothy was chosen to be his companion on the trip. In Texas, dad would seem quite perky, but at other times, he would not seem to be himself. His face would become drawn, and his speech would slur or he would stare out into space. He was straining to enjoy himself, and he would tire easily. At one point in time, his nose began to bleed uncontrollably, and we thought it was because of his blood thinning medication. We found out later he had Chronic Lymphatic Leukemia, which he kept from the family. He didn't want anyone to worry, and at his age, there wasn't anything anyone could do anyway. I had some great talks with him in Texas about his life, about his childhood, about his brothers and sisters, a time I will always cherish. A few days after the wedding, Jeanine and I had to leave, and dad continued his excursion with Dorothy and her family to Greg and Demcy's house, and soon that leg of the trip would also end.

When dad finally arrived back home in Lincoln, CA, Aileen and her husband Kristin and their children were at the airport to greet him. From the onset, Aileen and Kristin knew something was wrong. Dad began to lose weight precipitously, and both Aileen and Kristin were worried. Kristin had a rough upbringing with no real father. He sported long flowing brown hair and looked like he stepped off a scene in a "Sons of Anarchy" episode. His rough exterior belied the fact that he was actually a very caring person especially towards my dad. Dad had become a surrogate father to him. Kristin was the only one who was able to make my father eat when he didn't want to. It was because of Kristin that dad actually regained back some of his weight.

The family was notified about his condition but it looked like he was improving, so anyone outside of the state did not come to see him. Becky continued with her plans for her honeymoon in Mexico with her new wife Julian and life went on for others as well. Marjorie was on standby. I called Aileen and asked,

-Is Christopher coming? he needs to be here. Aileen answered

- Dad called for both Chris and Cecilia.

After her response, I could only think that Dad knew the end was near. There would be no other reason for him to bring Chris and Cecilia unless he knew. Dad cared about all his children and even carried a wallet with every child's picture in it. He wanted to know that all of his children would be okay when he was gone. He was most concerned about Chris, Cecilia and Gene because they were the ones who had faced either current or past challenges of a financial nature. Chris lived in Budapest, Hungary and needed extra time to get to the states. Dad paid for both Cecilia and Chris' trips. Gene lived in Roseville, California and Cecilia lived in Washington. Jeanine and I went to visit dad and he did not look good. He could barely lift his head, his speech was slurred and he had trouble walking from point A to point B without assistance. There may have been some denial about his health that Kristin and Aileen did not want to face hoping against hope dad would recover.

Dorothy came to help Aileen out for a couple of days. Two weeks prior to Dad's death, 24 year old, Kyle Matson, Dorothy's son came into the room and saw the weak condition of my father., He approached him, and sat by his side. He held his head in his lap and sat motionless for a few moments and then looked down and said, "Grandpa, I love you." Those words seem to comfort my father, and he smiled.

On the 22nd Dad began to feel a sense of urgency - it was only one day until his birthday, a milestone he had to reach. On the 23rd, dad's birthday, Kristin and Aileen took dad to the hospital. He was not recovering. The nurses fed him fluids intravenously and he stayed the night. The hospital asked if Aileen wanted hospice care or wanted him to recover. Aileen and Kristin wanted dad to recover, so they did not take the hospice care. They accepted the help of a nurse to come by on a periodic basis. While in the hospital, dad looked at Aileen, and said,

"I am now 93." Aileen understood dad in a way no others understood him. He was 93 - he made it to his birthday - he could now let go. Aileen comforted him and said,

"Dad, you have to hold on - Chris is coming tomorrow."

With that dad perked up, and seemed a bit more animated - he forced a smile.

Tony, his grandson and his wife Anna came to visit him. Margie was trying to get a flight out. Other members of the family were also making arrangements to come out.

Christmas was held at my house in Newark with Andy's family, but neither dad nor Aileen's family were able to make it because of dad's health.

On the 27th, Chris arrived with his Hungarian wife Ildiko. This was the second time I had met Ildiko. Ildiko was of medium height with hazel eyes and short brown hair that touched her shoulders, always smiling and polite. She spoke broken English but she had a calming effect on Chris. Chris found Ildiko late in life, and she and Chris had become inseparable. It was evident the love they shared with one another. Cecilia also soon arrived. She would stay until after the funeral. Andy and I went to visit dad the day Chris arrived. Dad looked even more feeble than the previous time I had visited. He only stayed in his chair for a few minutes barely noticing my presence. Any movement he made seemed to require every ounce of effort he could muster. Chris tenderly helped him back to his bed. Dad grabbed on to Chris as he stumbled down the hallway. Once Dad was in bed, Andy and I conversed with everyone there. We took everyone out to dinner. I was happy to see Chris. We had a good conversation. We hadn't seen each other for at least the past ten years or more and it was a pleasure to see Ildiko again.

The evening of the 28th, dad looked up at Aileen from his bed, and said, "I am ready..." Aileen knew what he meant. A few moments passed without Aileen uttering a word, and then she asked, "Are you afraid?" Dad strained his head to look up, eyes moistened, Aileen wiped the tear from his eye with her sleeve, and he responded, "yes"

Dad was put in his bed while holding Chris' hand. Dad had waited for Chris and Chris was finally there. When Chris tried to let go, dad held his hand tighter - dad did not want to let go. Chris understood at that moment that dad had waited for him. Chris would later tell me, "Dad prolonged death for me." It was the reconciliation between father and son. Christopher had a tumultuous life but at that moment, the past seemed less important. The relationship with his dad that he was able to recoup after years of anger and frustration was all that mattered.

Chris wrote in dad's obituary guestbook, "From the bottom of my heart I would like to thank you for being my friend and dad. It's difficult to say goodbye. Ildiko says that you will always be in her memory too. Thanks for getting me over there. It is a memory I will always cherish. I hope to make you proud - with all my love - best friends Chris" That night Aileen slept on the couch in the living room. She had an uneasy feeling and did not want to enter the room for fear that her father whom she loved dearly might not be alive. Dad slipped away at about 3 AM on the 29th of December, 2013. Christopher was unable to attend the funeral because he had to be back in Budapest, Hungary, but he was there when it counted.

Margie tried but was unable to get here in time to see dad alive. Margie did arrive about a day later. Other members of the family also began arriving. The funeral was held on January 10th to allow for members of the family to arrive. Aileen and Kristin were too busy to take time out after dad's death. Aileen was gathering papers, making arrangements, and tying up loose ends. The reception was held at St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Lincoln CA on Jan 9th, the day before he was laid to rest. Many close friends and relatives arrived for the reception and funeral. As the reception came to a close, guests began to leave and much of the family headed for the Bay Area. What no one realized is that Kristin and Aileen needed the most comfort, but everyone had left.

Aileen and Kristin went back to their empty two-story home with their three children. All of a sudden, they were alone - no one in sight. The solitude of that moment was unbearable. Aileen looked around the house, and

saw the portrait of my parents on the mantel, and the empty coffee-colored cozy lazy boy chair with those massive earphones my dad would use to hear the television, the spot where he would sit and doze off after the TV had been on for five minutes only to be awakened by the slightest noise or the mention of his name. She saw his empty computer room where he would also sleep and she could hear his voice reverberate in the emptiness of that moment, "Do you know what a trillion dollars is?", the question dad would pose to the cashier at the convenience store, the man standing next to him in line, the stranger he would meet in a casual conversation, and the person sitting next to him in a movie theater or "Did you vote for Obama?" , the type of questions that would normally be controversial coming from anyone else, but not when it came from my dad. But dad was not there. The surroundings were full of memories. For the previous eleven years, Aileen and Kristin cared for first mom and dad, and then when mom died in 2005, dad, and now they were both gone. Aileen tried to hold back the tears, but the death of our father and the loneliness she felt was unbearable and she would cry at the drop of a pin. She tried to hold back the tears, but felt overwhelmed, and the realization that dad would no longer be there suddenly hit her - she lost it. In an instant, all the feelings she was holding inside came bursting forth. The tears began to flow uncontrollably. She could not stop crying. Kristin went into the other room, and pondered what my dad meant to him. This person whom he had grown to love, whom he had also considered the father he never had was now gone forever, and they would somehow have to continue on without him. He too began to cry. This once proud man who had raised 14 children not always under the best of circumstances was now gone. He was not only a part of that greatest generation of soldiers that helped defeat the Germans and the Japanese during WW2, but he represented the end of a generation for the Dias clan as well, the tie that held the family together, and he will be missed.

January 1, 2016

[Margie Benes](#) wrote a response:

I have been out of town and have not been on facebook so I just saw this. WOW! This is beautiful Mark. Thank you for the summary. I cried. I have a few comments to add. I hope that is Ok. Dad's birthday came and went and I was feeling a bit sad but did not know what to do with my feelings. You have given me a place to express them. Thanks Mark. I too was there in Texas at Bryan's wedding and got to chat with Dad about all kinds of things (his favorite subject: "why are you not Catholic anymore Margie?") and I would divert the conversation, and he would go along to talk about other areas of interest. (His kids, grandkids, his growing up.) I wish I could remember the conversations. I do remember he seemed to want to doze off often. He would sit in a chair in Bryan and Jennifer's bedroom and we would give him headphones and he could watch a little TV--I picture him now watching as if he were still at home. I think he missed his bed at home, but he never complained. Then that one morning he woke up with the nose bleed. We all rushed to him with ice and compresses, and specific instructions to clamp down on his nose. After a couple of hours the bleeding did not stop so we had to take him to the hospital where they put a stint into his nose, blew up the balloon, to keep pressure on the internal blood vessels and eventually the bleeding stopped. He had to wear that thing for a couple of days until it fell out on its own. And he never once told us he had leukemia! He was always trying to keep that a secret. We never knew. I am so very thankful that I got to see him in Texas when he was fairly strong and alert. I am very thankful that Bryan and Jennifer got married when they did because several of us got to go to the wedding and see Dad as well (a double blessing). I get lump in my throat every time I realize that Aileen and Kris have had to go on without my dad at their side for the last two years. They were such great care-takers. I saw many miracles happen that week tho. We got to see dad while he was still healthy; He got to make one last trip to see his youngest son marry; Many of us got to hang out at Bryan's house and get to know Jennifer, and have such fun (and pillow fights with the kids,) Jeanine and Raeann and I and Dorothy got to decorate Bryan and Jennifer's new bedroom (which, by the way, they gave to me during my stay--precious!) Dad even gave his input on that one: "Well Hey, what are you doing?" "Dad, just stay where you are, we have to get the room ready for the newly weds." Dad: "OK, but why all the fuss?" "They are newlyweds Dad, we have to make it beautiful!" Dad never gave his voice of approval, but smiled at us, that proud sort of Dad smile. I always treasured that. The night before I flew home, I went into Dad's bedroom where he slept on a single bed, near the computers (reminded me of his bed at home,) I woke him up to tell him I was leaving. He jostled himself out of bed and stood up to greet me to give me a huge hug. That was the last time I would see him. He was strong and seemed healthy and I never imagined that was his last few weeks on earth. We never know when our time will come. Other miracles: Dad got to

spend valuable time with Dorothy and Milo while they escorted him (thank you to both of you); Cecilia and Chris, both got to come and be at Dad's bedside before he went home to heaven. I missed that part, but I am comforted by the legacy he left that I am only now coming to realize. I got to re-connect with Chris and meet Ildeko. (They have a blessed relationship.) Kristen showed off his new homemade guitars that he has been making and even played a little for me. Aileen took us to an old fashioned school house, miniature golfing, and we had great conversation. We all got to go to the park and play tag football. If I remember right, my team won. (that included me and Ildeko and Aaron against Chris and Adam and Alex and some unknown dog. Cecilia was rooting for us.) The winning part: I am not trying to rub it in or anything. I got to be with Aileen and Kris, and the boys, and with Cecilia and help to clean out his file cabinet, and go through memories, and have a bonfire in their front yard (is that legal?) We did not care, did it anyway. Dad would have been delighted if he could see us from Heaven. Bryan and I fought over who should keep the string of photos from Dad's wallet. I have a picture of that one smile emoticon I won, but came home, scanned them and sent the photos to Bryan. If anyone wants individual pictures of you all during childhood, I have at least one on my computer of each person. I love my family and wish we could be together more. Now that Dad and Mom are gone, we have to make a bigger effort. They were the glue that kept us all coming around. That was two years ago and I have not been back yet. We bloom where we are planted and hopefully I am making a difference here in Loveland. But I miss my family. I am coming back, I promise, this year! Love to you all.