

DAVID G. LAVENDER EULOGY
By Sarah Lavender Smith
Presented Saturday, February 23, 201

Good afternoon, and thank you so much for being here to say goodbye to my father and to celebrate the life of David Garrigues Lavender.

I know my dad is here with us this afternoon in spirit, but if he were *really* here with us, I bet he'd be sitting next to my mom there, *fidgiting*. He'd probably lean over and whisper, "How long will this take? I wanna get over to the Elks Lodge." But my dad's whisper was as loud as any regular voice, so everyone around would hear him. My mom would pat his knee and say, "Shhh, David, be patient. This is important."

My dad would want us to hurry and get over to the reception because nothing made him happier than gatherings with a lot of storytelling and laughter, and if he could pour a bourbon and get a card game going, then it was even better.

On the rare occasions when our family shared a big celebratory meal at a restaurant rather than at home, he'd retell old family stories and get us laughing to the point where the waiters and other guests would shoot us looks of annoyance. Then Dad would let loose with one of his favorite phrases: "Chalk this place off!" He didn't care if we weren't welcome to return; he just wanted us to have the best time possible then and there.

This uninhibited, funny, magnanimous side of my dad occasionally led to behavior that made me cringe, but more than anything I admired his ability to work a room and to make a friend out of every person he met.

Several years ago, when we were here in Telluride for the 4th of July, I observed and admired my dad's social skills as he volunteered as a parade marshal while my mom rode on a float with the Ladies' Poker Club. They both looked like they were in heaven. While my mom and her friends played cards and waved to the crowd from the back of a flatbed truck, my dad walked up and down Colorado Avenue wearing an orange vest that made him look official.

Ostensibly his job was to monitor the crowd. But what he was really doing was saying hello, shaking hands and laughing with almost every person along the sidewalk. He looked indescribably happy walking the main street of this town that he loved, and connecting with so many locals, including many of you here today, whom he cared about.

So here we are back in Telluride, which seems the most fitting place to be even though he called many other places home, including Northfield, Ojai, Colorado Springs, Montrose and Green Valley. Dad's career in development for colleges and high schools prompted him and my mom to move around quite a bit. My mom was an incredible partner to him and mother to us throughout all those moves—she unpacked and set up 15 different houses in 15 years!

But since Dad worked in the academic realm, he had summers off, and he and Mom began spending months at a time here.

First they camped at Woods Lake, before I was born. Picture my mom and dad in their late 20s and early 30s with four kids, cooking over a campfire and sleeping in a canvas tent. Dad loved to catch trout from Fall Creek, and he'd gut those fish, roll them in cornmeal, fry them in oil and serve them for breakfast.

Then I came along in 1969, and Mom put her foot down, saying she wanted a roof over her head with a newborn. So Dad bought a tiny house in Sawpit that he called "the tar paper shack." A few years later, he bought five acres from Aldasoro on Deep Creek Mesa. Then he hired a crew of longhaired locals to build our log cabin on Last Dollar Road. From my perspective as a little kid, it seemed like Dad and the builders and my older siblings enjoyed one long party during the house-raising that summer.

Ever since, Telluride has been our family's gathering spot. I don't know how many times my father drove his four-wheel-drive jeep or truck over Imogene or Engineer or Ophir passes, with all us kids and his beloved dog Lancelot riding in the back, but I can vividly picture him behind the wheel with a smile on his face.

When the truck hit a rocky, narrow spot on the pass, with a drop-off on one side, Mom would start reciting the Lord's Prayer and get out and walk because she was sure the truck would tumble off the cliff. But Dad would just laugh and holler some expletives, along with "hold on!," and then he'd shift to a lower gear and negotiate that tight spot. I never doubted Dad's ability to get us through.

It's also fitting we're here in Telluride today because in the summer of 1984, for Dad's 50th birthday, we had a pretty hilarious foreshadowing of today's events. A group of Dad's friends from Telluride drove out to Last Dollar Road to stage a mock funeral for him. They drove in a procession with their headlights on, they got out wearing tuxedo T-shirts, and then they carried a casket past the cabin that represented the death of Dad's youth. They proceeded to give him a good roasting, and Mom hosted one of her trademark spectacular parties. That day was a testament not only to Dad's friendships, and to the love Mom gave him, but also to his ability to laugh at himself.

These friendships—relationships—also were at the heart of Dad's professional life and key to his success. I've followed in his footsteps a little bit in terms of volunteering my time for alumni fundraising and capital campaigns. I know that when you work in the field of development, you can get preoccupied with crunching numbers and calculating an individual's capacity to give. My dad never lost sight of the people behind those numbers. He made it his job to get to know and care about the individuals involved with each campaign he worked on, and to really understand the cause that they were raising money for. He never lost sight of the fact that his job of raising money for nonprofits was really the job of building community and strengthening relationships for a worthwhile cause.

Now, I know that I'm praising my dad as if he were perfect and a pillar of success. But the truth, as my family knows, is that he was far from perfect, and he had a couple of significant low points in his career. I want to tell you about one of those low points, because ironically it was a high point in my relationship with him.

The year was 1981, so he would have been 47. My dad had left his position as Director of Development at The Thacher School following some acrimony with his boss. Keep in mind that Thacher was the school that he went to, and where he grew up because his father taught there, and he sent myself and two of my siblings there—so you can understand that he loved that school, and it was not at all easy for him to leave. But he decided to strike out on his own and create an independent consulting firm.

My dad being my dad, he considered some names for his new business that formed outrageous acronyms, including: Funding And Resources Team; or, College & University Management.

Finally he settled on Spectrum, which was an uncharacteristically boring name, and he rented office space on the other end of the Ojai Valley, so he had about a six-mile drive from home to work. Meanwhile, I was turning 12 and starting junior high, and my school was across the street from my dad's new office. So Dad with his new job, and I with my new school, started carpooling together in the mornings.

In 1981, I was at the height of my awkward phase and absolutely miserable in seventh grade. I wore glasses, braces and headgear; I had a short Dorothy Hamill haircut that went terribly wrong; and some kids at school called me Sarah-bral, as in cerebral palsy.

I think Dad sensed and perhaps empathized with my misery. One morning when we got in the car, one of us suggested that we take another route. I can't remember exactly why, or which of us came up with the idea, but we ended up driving slowly and somewhat aimlessly around a new subdivision that had cul-de-sacs. This was eye-opening to me, because our house on the East End of Ojai was on a semi-rural, straight street amongst avocado and orange orchards, so I had never seen cul-de-sacs before. The next day I asked if we could go look at the cul-de-sacs again, and he was happy to oblige.

Thus began a game: Every morning, on the way to school and work, we would see if we could drive a route that was different than the day before. We consequently drove every single side street of the Ojai Valley, and then drove them again in different patterns. We took more than 30 minutes to go six miles. And for some reason, Dad kept looping back to a street that had a nursing home called Mims Manor, which had a sign that read, “For Capable Senior Citizens.” Dad would slow down so we could spy on those gray-haired seniors with their walkers who were hanging out on the balcony, and he’d roar with laughter and say, “Sarah, remind me to be ‘capable’ in my senior years!”

Eventually, and sadly, we’d reach the other end of the valley. He would stop in front of my school, and I wouldn’t want to get out of the car. He never hurried me. He would remind me that he was right across the street, and on a few occasions I feigned illness so I could hang out at his office. He always welcomed my company and let me play on his typewriter.

For decades to come, my dad would look at me slyly and ask, “Wanna go look at cul-de-sacs?” It became our inside joke for being together and for escapism. I realize now, in hindsight, that it was hard for him to face going to work, just as it was hard for me to face going to school. Developing clients for his new business was really tough. But he got through it—we got through it.

Ultimately, Dad became successful in his new endeavor, and for several years he was constantly flying to work for clients in Colorado and Hawaii. He also leveraged his considerable skill as a writer to develop a second career in the 1990s as an author.

Dad was commissioned to write histories of two of the schools he worked at and cared deeply about—first, a history of Fountain Valley School, and secondly, a profile of Carleton College’s coach Jack Thurnblad. Then he breathed new life into two of my grandfather’s books by writing additional chapters for new editions of *One Man’s West* and *The Telluride Story*.

But the book he probably had the most fun writing was his 2005 collection of essays called *Fantasy Golf: A Search for Sanity*. He described himself and the book this way, quote,

“David G Lavender has the second-highest handicap among members of the Northfield, Minnesota, Golf Club; this dismal circumstance reflects his lifelong lack of ability on the links. This book comments on his confusion and bewilderment over the illogical societal changes and many wacko events that have become an integral part of the American way of life.”

This satirical, utterly unique and dare I say wacko book captures my dad’s passionate and truly remarkable hobby, which became a central part of his retirement years. Of course I’m talking about his role as The Commissioner in his Fantasy Golf League, or “The Commish,” for short. Everyone in this room probably knows what I’m talking about, but in case you don’t, Fantasy Golf is a game that began at the golf club in Northfield, and under Dad’s leadership, it expanded to clusters of golfers in places as diverse as Bend, Oregon; Reno, Nevada; and Pierre, South Dakota, as well as to Ojai and Telluride. He called the game FG, and the people who played were called the FG’ers.

I’ll read an excerpt from an introductory letter Dad wrote to the FG’ers in early 2012. He said:

“When I started running FG twenty or so years ago, I decided to see how much we could expand it. There was, in my perverted mind, some fascination in watching it grow – much as a chain letter expands as it makes the rounds.”

My dad then went on, in this letter that was emailed to over 200 Fantasy Golf players, to write a short description of each and every player. He spiced up these biographical blurbs with inside jokes, off-color humor and nasty nicknames. Of course he did not spare himself. Let me read to you how my dad described himself in the third person:

“David G. Lavender: In years past he has been referred to simply as “perfection personified” (and, more recently, as “Dear and Supreme

Leader”). However, 2011 was his worst year ever; his net side bet losses were an even \$1,000. Val is thoroughly pissed and is calling him names not suitable for a family publication.”

So, dear Dad, “Dear and Supreme Leader,” I hope you know how deeply we will miss you. Your grandkids will miss the grandfather who took them fishing, who taught them poker and who never suppressed his swear words. Your wife will miss the husband who played cribbage with her each afternoon and who gave her yellow roses on each of their 55 anniversaries. And, personally speaking, I will miss the father who showed interest in every race I ran, who offered praise and wise comments after every article I wrote, who drove me on those side streets and made me feel loved no matter what.

Dad, we are laying you to rest here in Telluride today, but I hope your spirit is somewhere playing another round of golf. I hope you are tossing a Frisbee to your best dog Albert. I hope you know how much you were appreciated, admired and loved.

Thank you.