

95th Birthday Remarks



Lew Miller, August 9, 2023

I am honored and feel blessed to have so many special friends present tonight for my 95th birthday party. I really appreciate the effort many of you made to be here!

Many people have asked me in recent days for the secret of my long and productive life. That question prompts me to share with you tonight the philosophy that has been the guiding force over those many years:

It is framed by my answers to a key question:

Who am I?

Have you asked the same of yourselves?

My answer, developed over time:

I am a child of God, placed on this earth for a purpose: to love others and help those in need whenever possible.

How can I fulfill this mission? By celebrating my life – and making a difference in the lives of those around me. I'll try to illustrate by citing highlights and asking a few of those present to share if and how I have made a difference in their lives. (Be warned: Dave will cut you off if you go beyond the 3-minute limit!)

As I reflect on those goals over the past many years, several overlapping patterns emerge:

1. My personal life with family, friends, travel, music and theater, and tennis, of course.
2. My church-related activities – and their extension to identify unmet needs in people, and help those people meet those needs when in my power to do so.
3. My longtime relationship with Princeton University
4. My entrepreneurial efforts to educate doctors and patients in ways to improve quality of life – both in the US and around the world
5. And my unwillingness to retire to an armchair and watch streaming video when I reached what some call “old age”.

I'd like to mention just a few examples in each area:

1. Family and Friends

I grew up with my fraternal twin brother Sandy, sadly deceased at 59 of cancer. His children, Jonathan, Faith and Tim, and Jon's wife Nancy, are here tonight with their children Christopher and Margaret. In addition, I want to recognize the friend I've known since first grade at PS 139:

Dr. Marvin Sears, retired head of ophthalmology at Yale. We stayed together at Poly Prep and Princeton.

I started dating my late wife, Jean, while I was at Princeton; we married soon after my graduation. Her love and support, and tolerance for meeting the challenges of our life sustained me, and her memory is cherished every day. I was exceedingly proud to attend Jean's graduation from Sarah Lawrence College when she was in her 60s, and I envied her success as a personal money manager. We had 65 wonderful years together before her death in 2015.

My son, Dave, and daughter, Kathy, who organized tonight's party together, have been a source of joy and pride to me.

Dave graduated from Emerson College and later married Nina Millett, who joins him tonight. He eventually became a special ed high school teacher. Before his retirement, he launched a successful off-campus school program to work with students with school and social phobias that prevented them from attending mainstream school.

Kathy followed me to Princeton, then launched a career in health care that included stints as a leader in hospital administration, reproductive health services, and more recently in the use of healthcare data to save costs and improve care. She has also been a leader in volunteer work at Princeton.

Jean and I travelled the world, sometimes with family, sometimes with friends. We enjoyed hurrying up to relax at our small vacation home on a quiet pond in Vermont. Our grandsons, Coleman and Caleb, who sadly have deserted us effete Easterners for the Far West, are both smart, caring, fun people we enjoy spending time with. Caleb is currently taking a break from work for 6 months and is surfing in Baja CA. Coleman and his wife are lapsed lawyers working in other areas and raising my two adorable great grandchildren in Seattle.

I've known Susan Dovell and Ray Dovell since they were little children whose parents were Jean's and my closest friends. I appreciate Susan coming in from Madison Wisconsin to be here!

2. Church and non-profit activities

I became involved in organized religion after marriage. At one point in my life, I seriously considered the ministry; fortunately my good friend and minister of the Darien Congregational church, also a Princeton alum, convinced me that there were many other ways to serve God.

In the 1960s, our church group created a 10-story apartment residence for low-income seniors in Stamford CT; in no time, we had a waiting list of elderly needing affordable housing – nothing has changed, has it?. And I started writing a book: How to Get the Best Possible Care from Doctors, Hospitals and Nursing Homes. It came out in hardcover and paperback, with two simple lessons for readers:

1. You have the right to know;

2. You have the right to say No.

I was also deeply involved in zoning battles in Darien – until then a single-family-home town with unspoken racial and religious restrictions. We successfully established an affordable housing project for seniors who could no longer afford to keep up big homes. We built garden apartments for town employees – police and teachers – who could not afford to buy such homes. Breaking down the zoning barriers allowed the eventual diversification of the town.

I was appointed to the board of the Workplace, a Southern CT nonprofit dedicated to helping underprivileged people learn job skills and get jobs with a future, and later to the CT Employment and Training Commission. Joe Carbone, current CEO of the Workplace, and I go back decades, working together to make job training and placement available to disadvantaged residents, and to helping employers recognize the resources available.
Joe?

3. My longtime relationship with Princeton University

My friendships with classmates have been long and have informed my life in so many ways: traveling together, intellectual discussions. MY work on the Daily Princetonian as an undergraduate profoundly influenced my career choices.

I chaired Princeton's Alumni Education programs for 5 years, became president of Princeton's great class of 1949 to preside over our 50th Reunion – and to induct tonight's music director Alex Donner, as an honorary member of our class (Cheers?). I'm currently Class President again as we head into our 75th Reunion in 2024!

Charley Stone is another Princeton classmate here tonight, and fellow class officer. His kids and Kathy were at Princeton together, making for many fun Reunions together.

4. My entrepreneurial activities

I became an entrepreneur after deciding to change from my Princeton major in diplomacy to journalism based on my reaction to interviewing Dr. Robert Oppenheimer (I haven't seen the new film yet, so no spoilers please!). He changed the world with development of the atom bomb, and was conflicted by the deaths it caused.

I spent the 1950s as a newspaper reporter and editor, including starting a weekly paper in Glastonbury CT which is thriving today. Then came my first failure – an essential element of entrepreneurship: I tried to start a national chain of suburban dailies, only to fall short of the necessary financing. Lesson learned: Don't quit your job until you raise the money!

I then became executive editor of Medical Economics, a popular business/management magazine for physicians. I traveled the country speaking about the hottest topic at the time: Medicare, and its potential impact. The speech got much applause in Palo Alto, and almost

gotten me ridden out of town on a rail in San Antonio – a foretaste of today's political dichotomy.

Carroll Dowden, here with his wife Eleanor and son Mark and Mark's wife Jennifer, joined my editorial "family" in the '60s and has remained a close business partner and friend. Mark is now involved with Helping Immigrants Thrive! Carroll?

I left Medical Economics to launch our innovative journal for primary care physicians: Patient Care. "That must be a magazine for nurses," many people said, but we wanted docs to focus on the day to day needs of patients: How to treat the tired housewife, how to diagnose abdominal pain, how to minimize drug interactions. The readers loved our new approach and so did advertisers; we were in the black within 9 months.

Having spent time in Mexico during college, I wondered if a Spanish language edition of Patient Care would be well received. So we hired a bright young business student, Pedro Vera, to launch Atencion Medica. Alejandro Vera, son of my late business partner, and his wife Jimena are here from Mexico City. Alejandro?

Our international editions multiplied: to Spain, Venezuela, Holland, Belgium, England, Switzerland, Scandinavia, Australia. I attended Columbia Business School part-time to become a better leader, and launched two new related enterprises: Milcom Medical Record Systems, and Continuing Medical Education courses. However, I realized that our small company couldn't cope with unforeseen changes in exchange rates, and therefore sold most of our foreign subsidiaries to partners who paid us royalties in dollars.

Our Records division developed a highly successful maternal newborn record system that reduced errors in labor delivery and postpartum care – and malpractice suits as well. It was used for 1 in 3 births in the US. Seeing a need for people in the CME field to learn together, I founded the Alliance for Continuing Medical Education and later the Global Alliance for Medical Education. Several of us created a certification course for CME professionals. Our efforts led later to the formation of WentzMiller Global Services, a consulting service, with partner Dr. Dennis Wentz, and current chief principal of WentzMiller, Barbara Pritchard.

This has all culminated in my current refusal to have a traditional retirement. So I want to share what I think of as my final chapter: Helping Immigrants Thrive, a nonprofit I founded over a year ago to assist undocumented immigrants arriving in New York to live a useful life here in this sanctuary City. These are folks not eligible for food stamps or any other federal services, but who want to learn English, job skills and provide for their families. I want to thank our board members who are here tonight, and add my thanks to so many of you who have made contributions via PayPal to this nonprofit. Our executive director, Gil Cintron, is here tonight as a new friend.

Gil?

Please enjoy the rest of your evening. Alex's musicians will be with us until 9:30, so there's still time to dance! With every one of you, I have celebrated life – and I love you all.