**Letters written to Chuck Freeman for his 60th birthday from friends and family, June 1988**



Chuck Freeman, April 1978

Well Darling,

It’s your turn to be roasted, toasted, basted and reminded of all those things you’ve forgotten or at least wished the world had.

We go back a long way, you and I, probably to the beginning of time. I think God planned us for each other, for how else could such diverse personalities from opposite ends of the United States have ever gotten together if it hadn’t been for God’s planning? And we know a lot about God’s planning don’t we, since we’ve experienced so much of it in these past thirty eight years. No that’s not a mistake, I’m counting from the year we met.

I clearly remember our first quick meeting. You were playing cards with Jimmy Alessi and Buck Pieters when I came to pick up Diane. We were introduced but there was not big flash of light signifying THIS IS IT! Our next meeting was a blind date arranged by Diane, which you almost refused because you thought I was too young. You, the suave and debonair Marine. Little did either of us know what was to come of that! We had two weeks and you left for home (Mass.) to be discharged from the Marines. Then you came again in August as a surprise, which Diane knew about and for once didn’t say a word. I remember Mary and I had just turned out the light to go to bed when you came knocking at the door. We sat up all night on the bench in the back yard and had to throw bones to Rusty to keep him off of us. After two hectic weeks you left again. In September you were recalled into the Marines. Mary and I spent many an evening at St. Gregory’s in prayer. I’m sure that’s what kept you out of Korea.

Then in January you came on furlough, another surprise. The handsome Marine met me at the door of work and I just walked out without a word to anyone. I almost got fired! On that trip you gave me my ring and I met your parents again. I can say it now and know you will understand. Was I ever glad when you left! I don’t think I got more than four hours sleep a night while you were there. Then I found out you were sleeping during the day while I was working.

Then we were married in April and after two weeks you left again. Seems like all you were doing was coming and going.

The letters you wrote and now never write. The joy you showed as each child was born. How hard you worked to change the things I didn’t like. All the shows you were in and how proud I was of you. The many things you built for me when I got a “new idea”. Wallpapering the bathroom ceiling. Watching your ever growing faith in your walk with the Lord. Being able to say one word and being able to bring forward a memory to make us laugh. When I think about it the laughter has always been there. Oh, there have been bad times, but you know, sitting here I can’t think of one to write about. Our camping trips with the kids and then the many trips you so carefully planned just for us.

I remember. I remember. It goes on forever and I hope it does! So all I can say is

Happy Birthday and Many More

Dear Grandpa,

My memory of you is when you took us camping with you to the Redwood Forest. I really enjoyed going especially since it was my first camping trip. Ever since I have joined the Boy Scouts since I like camping.

Gary Buckmaster

I have tried on five different occasions to write about my memories. On the date they are due, I will try once more to compose them without crying.

The thing that I remember most is a special look you use when you are proud of us. I think I first became aware of it when I made my first communion. It didn’t reduce me to tears until I got much older. In fact I was often able to get through most emotional occasions without crying as long as I didn’t look at you, or see you looking at me. The first real occasion was high school graduation. I was walking out of the school stadium and looked up in the stands and saw you standing there, all alone, watching. I started crying, because you were so proud….

I don’t know why you have this effect on me - - people will think we didn’t get along. The reality is you are still me Daddy, the second most important man in my life.

Donna

Dad,

Probably the reason I’ve waited this long to finally write this, is I know this will take a long time to write. Not that it will necessarily be a long narrative (it will) but it’ll send me off on countless journeys down memory lane.

Now that I have sons, I can only look back with wonder at the awesome responsibility you took on in raising us with precious little formal training.

One can recall from history, only a very few examples of men who took on similar challenges. There was the 600 year old man who, as far as we know, had not training as a shipwright or a zoologist, and yet built a ship and took care of two of every creature. There was the fugitive murderer who conviced thousands of people to pack up and wander around a desert for 40 years, hoping to find a better place to live. And who can forget those twelve guys, 2,000 year ago, who got together and organized a church because their leader said crazy things like “…love your enemy…” and “…forgive your brother… “

And you, dad, like them were successful because you had the same support system as the. You taught me to use that support system. You taught me that God is number one.

I remember as a small boy, coming into your room in the evening and seeing you on your knees in prayer; how much you stressed the importance of going to mass together; and that look on your face when I was about 6 or 7 years old and told you I wanted to be a priest.

Remember how you drilled me in the Latin responses to the mass and we both eagerly waited until I was big enough to carry the book. You were always involved in the Church, Knights of Columbus, Legion of Mary etc. Somehow you even managed to help out financially even though you were supporting a huge family.

That brings me to another lesson you taught me—devotion to family. You taught me that after God, family was the most important thing in your life. Even though there were probably times you felt like getting away from it all, you hung in there and always made sure we had all we needed and then some, even if it meant working two jobs. Through it all, you managed to find time to spend with each one of us individually.

I’ll mention just some of those times we spent together. I can’t take my sons to a ball game without stirring wonderful memories of the times we took the bus to the Coliseum and watched Duke Snyder and the Dodgers. I used to pester you for hot dogs and souvenirs just as my boys pester me now.

Speaking of my sons, it’s amazing how they remind me of my childhood and you. I showed them how to drive nails and they must have put a hundred of them in a 2x4. Wasn’t it you who said of me/ “If two nails are good, two hundred are better”. I spend a lot of time these days picking up my tools from around the yard, cleaning mud off my claw hammer and wondering if I’ll ever see those needle nose pliers again.

Remember that day, when I was in the eighth grade? You took a day off and showed me poverty and wealth. We visited uncle Les, had lunch at the Music Center and went to that car lot where I fell in love with a brand new 1968 Ford Thunderbird. You tried to teach me the value of education. Why did it take me so long to lear?

There are countless other things I’ve learned from you, dad, but one other must be mentioned. No matter how much you loved us, mom always came first.

We kids noticed the hugs and kissed when you got home each evening, the little terms of endearment, and the phone calls from work nearly every day.

Though you had differences of opinion, we knew you’d back mom up all the way. We quickly learned we couldn’t play you off each other. Mom’s word had your full authority behind it. The most terrifying words mom ever spoke were, “Wait until your father gets home.”

If I put into practice half of what you taught me, I’ll be very successful indeed.

The world measures success by fame and fortune. Your fortune may not be huge but do you realize that 86 people know you just be direct relation? That’s not counting hundreds of friends and distant relatives!

No, your success is measured each Thanksgiving when all your offspring get together and enjoy each other’s company. Eleven children, eight children in law, twenty-one grand children all loving each other is a success story beyond compare.

God has a job for everyone, and yours was a big one. Though you’ve not quite finished, you’ve met the challenge and you deserve a place right next to Noah, Moses and the Apostles.

I Love You Dad, and I thank you,

David.

How do I describe one of the most unique individuals I’ve ever met?

Well, I remember the first time I met Dad. He walked in a little while after I first met Mom. Although he seemed a little preoccupied – he was taking a photography class and had his camera in hand – he, like mom, seemed to be an interesting person to know.

Before David and I were married, I remember returning from work to my apartment to find a single rose and a letter. The rose was beautiful, but what brought tears to my eyes was the letter you left with it dad. In that letter you declared me your eighth daughter, and there has been no doubt since that day that you meant it.

I am grateful to again know a father’s love, and especially now, I’m thankful that my children know their grandfather’s love- that means so much to me.

Dad, you’ve watched us go through so many changes; although it may have been difficult for you, you supported us and accepted our decisions without criticism.

Also, the Bible mentions something about the timely word being very pleasant, well, you always seem to have handy an answer, an anecdote, or an appropriate word of wisdom.

The only time I didn’t appreciate your gift of wisdom was when David, you and I were playing Trivial Pursuit, and I was sure I had you beat on a question about the Brooklyn Dodgers – you not only answered correctly – you wryly said you were there!

What I am probably most grateful for, though, is the fact that you’re a#1 son is so like you. You taught him well, and although I find it hard to understand “you Freeman men” sometimes. I’d like to make it a lifetime project.

I Love You Dad.

Your Daughter, Annette

Dancing With My Daddy

Donna and I went to a Knights of Columbus Father Daughter dace with Dad. In my memory, it seems like just yesterday but in reality it was about 20 years ago. I remember I was in seventh grade because the yellow dress I wore (one of 6 identical pastel dresses mom made for us the previous Easter) still fit. I felt so grown up going dancing with my dad. I was even allowed to wear makeup!

Dad tried so hard to teach me a few basic steps. In particular, the basic or not stepping on the feet of your partner step. Between dances we sat and enjoyed each other’s company, while sipping our Cokes, just like the big folks. The band was quite good, or so my memory recalls and played dances to suit any age group.

Dad and Donna entered the polka contest and won 1st place. The trophy, a little gilded plastic loving cup with the inscription “world’s greatest dance,” ended up in the toy box at home. I was so proud of my daddy for winning the trophy.

My best memory of the evening, however, came when the band started playing some rock and roll pieces and dad surprised me by asking me to dance. Needless to say, I was quite surprised that my daddy knew how to dance to rock and roll music. . . the music he was always yelling at us to “turn that thing down”. Anyway, we got out on the dance floor and dad really went to town. I told him he looked like Baloo.

Daddy, I want to thank you again for the wonderful evening we had twenty years ago and all of the other wonderful times we have had since then and will have in the future.

I Love You Daddy!!!

Annmarie

P.S. I don’t step on people’s toes any more when I dance.

Dear Daddy

Whatever happened to my childhood days? Even though my birth certificate says I was born in 1956 it can’t possibly be that long ago. No one can be grown up yet and have such vivid memories as if they happened only yesterday.

There are so many things I could write about, each thought triggers another, enough to write a whole book, but as usual I have waited until the last minute to get this done and so there is only time for a few short pages.

Do you remember when you use to put your records on in the evening after we had all gone to bed? There was always a stack of four or five on them, Glen Miller, Tommy Dorsey, Sidewalks of Paris. I can even remember some of the dust jackets, there was one that fascinated me of an invisible man playing the trombone and wearing a top hat, white silk scarf and gloves. To this day I still can’t remember which of the Dorsey brothers it was.

Sometimes when I was a bit older you would put the music on before bedtime and we would sit on the old green couch and listen. I think one time I must have stayed up too late or was really tired and fell asleep. You had to carry me to bed and that started the habit. Whenever I thought I could get away with it I would pretend I was asleep so I could be carried to bed.

The last time I remember falling asleep to your music must have been the holiday time and most of us were sick, even mom. You had gotten out of the habit of listening to that set of records, but that night you had put the old stack on. Everyone was in bed and the lights were turned low. I got out of bed and came into the living room. There, laying down on the couch, with your feet up, probably exhausted, but still ready to take care of and protect us.

You will always be my White Knight.

Eileen

I remember a certain high school CCD class that was so unruly that they had gone through three teachers. As a last resort a certain Mr. Freeman was called in. He was the principal and they could not find anyone either brave enough or stupid enough to take charge for the last night. He survived incense burning, smoke bombs and a tirade of verbal abuse.

I also remember meeting this same Mr. Freeman again (hoping he didn’t remember me!) while I was dating his daughter. And I’ll never forget something he said when I expressed my astonishment at his letting me borrow his car – He said “I trust you with something far more valuable than my car…my daughter.”

Pat

Dear Poppa:

I like you because you are funny especially when you cheat when you took me to play miniature golf because you went out and practiced in the morning.

It was a lot of fun to go miniature golfing and one time we all hit our ball into the same spot. You also told me to watch grandma and do what she did and she kept messing me up.

But I had fun anyway

Jennie

My fondest memories of you were when I was quite small. I remember you taking the older ones for walks in the snow when we lived on Paradise and you taught us to make snow angels. I couldn’t get up without messing mine up so you had to pick me up to get out.

I also remember getting up before the crack of dawn so that I could go with you and a few of the older ones the day we moved to Juniper. You were getting a head start that morning before mom and the little ones were ready to come over and I wanted to make sure that I got to go with you.

I remember walking home from Nativity one day by myself, which was quite the normal thing to do then, when I was sure that someone was following me. I looked back to see you a little way back so I waited for you to catch up. It was nice having someone to walk home with for a change. We played shadow tag all the way home. Then there was the time that I came home from school the day you came back from Boston, I was going to try to surprise you and come in the back door of the house. But when I did, you and mom were on the service porch changing one of the boy’s diapers. So much for surprises.

Whenever we’d go anywhere in the car, we always asked to sing McNamara’s Band, mom hated it but we loved it and you always sang it anyway. How were we to know at the time that you didn’t sing very well. It was great to us. Car trips were always great until we all got too big.

Then when I got older, and I got my first job, I didn’t have a car yet so you would drop me off and pick me up on your way to and from work. I had to get up pretty early to do it, especially since it was my first summer that I had to get up at all. We didn’t always talk much during those trips every day, but if I ever needed to talk, you were always there for me.

You’re still always there for me if every I need something, even if it is just to talk.

Mary

Dad,

As I look back on my life as your daughter, I think about all of the roles you have played and am amazed at the versatility you have shown. You have been my Daddy, my Playmate, my Teacher, my Protector, my Father and my Friend.

First you were my Daddy: Letting me sit in your lap, pushing on your nose and pulling on your ears to watch your tongue move back and forth; showing me how to click my tongue until I could make a noise louder than you; coming to get us kids out of the tub on Saturday nights to dry us off when we yelled “Daddy, got a wet one!”

As I grew, you became our Playmate: letting us kids push you out of bed on Saturday mornings, then roaring like a lion until we squealed and giggled; playing hide and shoot in the house until mom kicked us all outside; taking the whole neighborhood to the ‘Park in the Dark’ to play capture the flag and to Tastee Freeze for ice cream afterwards because we all chanted “I’m hot and I’m hungry” until you finally did; playing monopoly with us; playing Hearts and To Hell With It with us. You usually won and we could all tell when “Dad’s gonna RUN IT!!” because you would slap down the next card even before you picked up the cards from the previous play.

You became my Teacher, always teaching something: You taught us the value of money, letting us polish your shoes for a quarter a pair only after they passes your inspection; you paid us for washing the bus based on how well we did the job; you took us to McDonalds for “coke, root-beer or orange.” We were always disappointed when we didn’t get hamburgers. You wanted to give us a treat even though you count’s afford to buy lunch for the bunch of us. I overheard you and mom talking about paying bills one day. That’s when I became worried that we would have to go to the poor farm. But no matter how much money you had or how many mouths you had to feed, we never seemed to lack for anything and we never had to go to the poor farm. I’m still amazed at how you managed that.

You taught us discipline: We knew how to clean our rooms enough to pass inspection, even if it took a couple of tries each week. Of course we had to learn or we couldn’t go out to play. We knew how to behave in church and at other people’s houses. I once heard a lady talking to a man at a wedding we went to when I was about 13. She said how well behaved the Freeman children were. I was so proud, I smiled from ear to ear. You also taught us how to go to bed and go to sleep. We might have required a few warnings with the belt, but we eventually got the message (Daddy don’t spank me I’m, sleeping).

You also taught me how to make the best peanut butter and raisin sandwiches.

You were my Protector: I remember being sick with a fever on more than one occasion, and having you come home from work and put your cool hands on my forehead. I felt safe with you there. In order to make sure we didn’t leave anyone behind, you came up with the roll call system every time we went somewhere. Donna would take roll and report back to you. You sat down with me when I wanted to move out to my first apartment to make sure I could afford everything I would need.

You are my Father: You have always been there for me at the important times in my life. You helped me buy my first car. I remember you telling me not to let them know how much I wanted the Fiat so you could bargain with them. You were at my Graduation. Of all the people to be there I wanted you there most. You gave me to George on my wedding day. You were there at the hospital at 6:00 in the morning when I lost my first child. You came to visit me in the hospital when Hannah was born. You have always been there when I needed you.

Now you are also my Friend: I love it when you are home when I come to pick up Hannah at the end of the day. You always walk me to the car and give me a big hug. I always look forward to the next day.

For all of these things and many more, I thank you. I have always felt that I have had a special childhood and I want the same for my children. It’s no wonder with you as my Father. Mom knew what she was doing when she married you.

I salute you on your 60th birthday!!!

I Love You Daddy!

Jenny

Jenny asked me to write down some of my memories of you for your sixtieth birthday. Although I’ve only know you for 5 short years, it seems like you’ve always been there. Maybe that’s because whenever Jenny and I have something to share, either good or bad, you are always there. My memory works with pictures so that as I reminisce it’s like a curtain being drawn from a window. I’ll share some of these windows of mine with you since they say a lot about the kind of man you are.

Proud. The first window is of you leading your daughter down the aisle. A big beaming smile on your face. I guess it never gets routine no matter how many times. I see that same picture the first time you held our tiny daughter.

Compassionate. In January of 1986, Jenny and I discovered that our first child had died. What made it all so more tragic was to have to go through delivery knowing the dismal outcome. My second window sees you sitting in the lobby of the hospital at 5:30 a.m. as we walked through the door (you were already waiting for us to offer support).

Happy. Several windows open here. I see you at various family gatherings smiling and enjoying the expanse of your growing family. A true patriarch, happy with his contribution to this world.

Helpful. I called you when I cut back my cypress trees and got the chain saw stuck 15’ off the ground in the trunk of the tree. Though a neighbor helped me fix the problem when he saw my predicament I still have a window showing you pulling to a stop in front of the house only minutes later with ropes and ladders like the calvery.

Knowledgeable. When I recently tried to finish my retaining wall at my house I got stuck. I wasn’t sure what king of wood to get. You told me and darned if I didn’t go and get the wrong type anyway. In desperation to make the project work out I called you and a new window of my mind remembers you dropping your own project and coming to look at mine. Not only did you point out my mistake but you took the time to help me locate the right material and loaned me your truck to get it.

Thanks for these brief memories, these windows I recall and many more. On your sixtieth birthday congratulations. I hope you live to be one hundred.

George

Dad, You have given me many memories over the past twenty six years. You’ve given me values. Taught me Morality, and Most of all gave me the religious background which played a major role in helping me get where I am in my relationship with Jesus.

I honestly don’t know how you did it, considering I fought with you tooth and nail most of the way. But, because of all you’ve done for me I love and respect you more than any other mortal man.

I remember when I was a small child I used to ask you question after question. I though it annoyed you and one day when you and I were going someplace in your ever present VW van I asked if my questions bothered you. Your response was that’s the best way to learn things and that you were happy I was so inquisitive.

To me the most special times we spent together were when we were involved with Indian Guides. In fact, when Pat was old enough to join I was kind of jealous because with all the children you had Indian Guides was my special time with my dad. That really meant a lot to me.

I think the best memories I have of time spent with you is all the camping and backpacking we have done together. To this day I am very thankful that you struggled to make ends meet as opposed to being wealthy because I learned more from you in the great outdoors than I would have ever learned had our vacations taken place at hotels and in mobile homes.

There are many things you did raising us kids that I never understood or agreed with until now that I have a family of my own. Now I find myself doing many of those things the same way.

I love you very much dad and I hope and Pray that I will be as good a father to my children as you have been to me.

Michael

As I sit at my desk and listen to the Beatles, on of the great things other than myself that arrived in America in 1963, I think back on my life as it has unfolded since then. As much a contribution my life has been to this world, it probably would not be if it weren’t for my father, Karl Joseph “Chuck” Freeman.

I can’t say that I have always agreed with Dad but there are certain lessons and gifts from him that will never be forgotten, and his good reputation will be long remembered.

When I was in grade school, I was constantly rebuked by Dad for not getting good enough grades. I’m sure that he must have thought then about me what I think now about Josh, that I had the brains but was just too lazy to use them. I can only imagine how frustrating that must be to a father.

As time passed, Dad eventually relaxed his death grip on my life and to this day, I still wonder if it was because he gave up on me or was just trying a new tactic. Either way, he lost the battle because even though I graduated, I had a very poor grade point average.

I don’t believe that in itself will ever hinder me in the course of my life, but the fact of the matter is I didn’t live up to my Father’s expectations. Maybe I should have tried a little harder.

Later, as I got into music, I had an opportunity to see Dad in a different light and there were times when he seemed quite proud. His faith in me was ultimately displayed on Christmas Eve when he gave me the guitar. I swore then that I would someday make him proud of me.

I may never become a famous musician and I man never even publish a book but I will not stray from that oath I made to myself.

Dad never had a lot of money so there will be no family legacy in that respect, but there will always be the inheritance of the Family name and the legacy that comes with it. How many of us, his children, have gotten a job because of someone who knew Dad, either by reputation or directly? How many got loans for cars because Dad co-signed only to be paid back with late payments that became black marks on his credit rating. My own life has been easier because of Dad’s reputation as an honest man and I will do what I have to do to keep that name well received.

Moreover, who can say that he or she was ever in a jam and Dad did not do everything in his power to help out even at his own expense? That’s the kind of person I want to be to show Dad that his efforts to teach his children well were not in vain.

I guess I could have been a little less serious but comedy usually comes at someone’s expense and I didn’t feel that that was appropriate.

I will recount a lighter episode from my early days: One Christmas I received a gas operated model airplane. It didn’t work. We tried and tried but to no avail.

When the stores opened again we went down to exchange it. Unfortunately we had to wait for Dad to get off work, so by the time we got the new one home it was dark out and we couldn’t go outside to try it.

We couldn’t wait another day. While Dad was reading a book in the very next room we decided to see if the new one would work. With Steve sitting on top of it to hold it down I cranked back the propeller carefully.

Our hearts were pounding out of our chests with anticipation of what would happen next. We had given no thought to the consequences of our action either in a parental or physical aspect.

At last the moment had come. I had wound the propeller as far back as the spring would go. The sharp edge of the blade cut into my finger as I fought the spring for control. Beads of perspiration formed on Steve’s forehead as he struggled to contain his grip on the fuselage of the aircraft. I could hold on no longer. I let go.

Instantly the room was filled with the high-pitched scream of the tiny single-cylinder engine. Steve’s face was as white as a sheet (though not his sheet) as he struggled to control the situation that had erupted before us.

In what took a mere ten seconds in reality, but seemed like ten minutes, the engine finally sputtered and died. The two of us shook in a mixture of shock of what had just happened and the fear of what would happen when Dad came storming into the room.

We waited like two convicted murderers awaiting execution, but our sentence had somehow been lifted. Dad never came in.

We put the evidence back in the box it had come in and hid it in the depths of the infamous toy box.

Eventually, curiosity got the best of us and we couldn’t resist a reconnaissance mission into the living room where we knew certain death awaited us. We crossed the expanse of hallway between our room door and the living room and slowly peered into the room. Dad was sitting in his favorite chair reading a book, obviously completely unaware of what had just taken place.

As Steve and I returned to our room with relief we wondered silently if it was fate or a greater power that had spared our lives that night, but we knew that few men experience such adventure and live to tell about it.

Patrick

Dad

I have many great memories of you.

What I admire the most is your constant understanding no matter what I do. You may not always agree but the understanding is there. My favorite memories are of camping. I don’t understand how you could drive all those miles with all us kids going crazy and not one single accident. You took us to some of the most beautiful country the U.S. has to offer. Because of you, camping will always be one of my favorite pastimes. Thank you for just being you, I love you with all my heart dad!

Happy Birthday!!!

Steven

Dear Dad,

Looking back on my childhood and teenage years, I have to say that no one has made quite an impression on my life as you have.

As a child, life was great. Being the youngest in this family could have been a potentially frightening experience with all those older siblings practicing for parenthood on me. However, you were always there to protect me from them. I never really experienced the older kids telling me “You can’t go. You’re too little,” because all the best things to do were with you. The Park-in-the-Dark I’m sure is a highlight in the life of every child that grew up on this street. And you always let me go along.

And what about those times that we used to wait at the end of the street, waiting until you would come home, so we could sit on your lap and steer the bus all the way down the street. I remember fighting with the other kids over whose turn it was to steer.

Any time I was in a show, no matter how stupid it may have seemed to you, you were always there, and you were so proud of me. That was very important to me, to make my father proud of me, as it is with any child. Many children’s parents never showed up at the shows, but you were always there never fail.

Well, as I grew older our relationship became quite rocky. We never seemed to understand each other. We couldn’t even hold a normal conversation without getting into an argument, so we spoke very little. I always said to myself, that I was never going to be like you. But as it turned out, I am more like you than anyone else in this family.

I have inherited your stubbornness, which now explains why we bumped heads so often. I also, like you, feel emotions a lot stronger than most people, which caused our confrontations to be even more devastating than just a plain argument. There are a lot of traits that I am very glad I inherited from you. Your sense of family is one of the greatest things about you which only increases as you get older. You are also a very empathetic person, you feel just as much pain, just as much joy as the person telling you. I never had to worry about you shooting down my enthusiasm about anything.

Dad, there are also many traits that I love about you that I haven’t quite cultivated yet, but I’m working on it. You are a wonderful conversationalist. You can hold your own in a room full of strangers and find out something interesting about each person in that room and remember it, as well as feel completely comfortable and have a good time to boot. You never say anything derogatory about anyone. This family is very judgmental, and when one person starts, they all jump on the bandwagon, except you, of course. You don’t even judge your family for being this way. You just stay quiet and don’t say anything. That is my definition of a truly kind human being. I could go on forever, but I need to save some room for everyone else.

In short, Dad, my relationship with you can be epitomized by the little boy, who at 5 years old thought his dad was Superman, at 14, he thought his dad knew nothing, and at 20 he couldn’t believe how much his dad had learned in 6 years.

Happy sixtieth birthday Dad, here’s hoping there are sixty more so I can learn, maybe not everything, but at least a lot more about life from you.

I will always love you,

Sharon (Fat Daddy’s Lamby)

Dear Chuck,

As you approach two-thirds of a century of life, I am privileged to join the throng of family and friends invited to share “memories” to enliven you hitting the “Big 60.” Though undoubtedly many will have much more to say, none is more sincere than I when I tell you that you have been and are among the most extraordinary and most influential people in my life.

As if you didn’t have enough children already, I am so grateful and blessed that you have made room for (at least) two more. Lynne and I both have felt privileged to feel, really and truly, a part of your family, and you have taught us in a very beautiful way some of the most profound meanings of that word. And I think you are getting better at teaching all the time!

Alas, I must confess I did not feel that way at first. When I first ventured into your home at Dave’s invitation some twenty-two years ago, I first thought I was in the company of a real “drill sergeant,” but I told myself, not ever having seen or experienced a “mega-family” in action, that just as God brought order out of the primordial chaos, I was witnessing a “creation” which came into being when Chuck Freeman’s voice thundered, “AWWRRRIGHT!!! THAT’S ENOUGH!!!” LET THERE BE QUIET, AND IT WAS QUIET. AND THE LORD CHUCK LOOKED AT WHAT HE HAD MADE, AND SAW TO IT THAT THEY WERE GOOD.

Indeed they were, and still are, very good. Fortunately, I came to know not the “drill sergeant,” but rather the “coach,” the craftsman, the artisan-father who learned, like Michelangelo, not to command but to “coax” his “David” out of a hunk of marble. And so I learned my lesson. I’m reminded of Mark Twain, who said, “When I was seventeen, I thought my father was the most ignorant person I had ever know. When I was Twenty-one, I was amazed at how much he had learned in four years!” You can certainly be proud of each of your two generation of works of art, your children and grandchildren. We have grown together, you and your, through the years, and have shared many joys and some sorrows. You have mellowed and grown in holiness and have been a real example of a Spirit-filled, dedicated Catholic, an inspiration to all of us. In many ways you have been an inspiration to all of us. In many ways you have been a support in my vocation as a priest, and I deeply appreciate your prayers, advice, challenges and encouragement over these many years. As the Church has changed, as the involvement of lay people has increased, it seems to me you have been most ready and willing to be of service, a true lover of the Lord and a pace-setter in his Church.

And you have been such a special friend and companion to my Mom and Dad, bringing them into your family and helping them feel no longer “exiles in a strange land,” giving them something of that family sense which they missed so much. Lynne and I owe you a special debt of gratitude for that, and I’m sure that, from their place in heaven, they are praying for and blessing you.

During my high school days in the minor seminary, Cardinal McIntyre made his annual visit on March 19, the feast of St. Joseph. He always spoke of Joseph as the “vir fidelis,” the “faithful man.” Your own constant faithfulness to Terry and your children, your humble acceptance of the mysterious ways of the Lord in leading your family through strange paths and sometimes “into the valley of darkness” have given you the privilege of sharing the title given Joseph by the late Cardinal. In that respect, you are certainly a “major leaguer.” And lest you feel uncomfortable in being place in a saint’s category, let me soften the blow by assuming the identity with another “foster Son” and say, gratefully, that you have had much to teach me.

The Lord Jesus had a knack for stretching loaves and fishes to feed thousands. In raising your “mini-Church” on Payette Drive, you have had similar, if not quite miraculous, practice. But your miraculous gift, one for which I am certainly thankful, is the ability you have always to make room at your table for those in need of nourishment - - in body, but particularly in spirit. As you have supported all of us, your physical and extended family in our journeys of faith, know that my prayers and blessings are with you to speed you on your own, till that day she you finally meet the Father from whom all fatherhood on earth takes its name. My hunch is, he’ll be at the heavenly dining-room table (even bigger than yours), dishing out the soup, and you’ll hear his say, “Come on in, Chuck, we’ve been saving a place for you!”

Happy 60th Birthday, with lots of love,

Gary (the elder)

Mr. F. I have only been around your family, mostly your youngest daughter, for only five years so I can honestly say I don’t know you as well as all the other people with whom I am sharing space in this book. I must mention, however, some of the memories I have of you.

First off, I guess I can say that there is no other feeling than the one a young man has when he’s trying to date the youngest daughter of a man who’s had eleven children, seven of them girls, all of them married except two (at that time). A young guy is trying to look sharp, sound intelligent, show all of his best traits but he’s nervous and very cautious. I tried my best to make conversation the first time we met. I was partially relieved as you said, in your masculine deep bass voice, “Hello, Joe”. I think you even shook my hand. You looked at me like there had been a thousand who came before me, all the same lines, same style but boy, I felt like a pig in you-know-what. There it was. I was going out (and still am) with a gorgeous girl and had even managed to jump that first hurdle - - the introduction to the father. I knew I had made one small step for man but still had the giant leap to go.

The next four years was filled with hundreds of visits to your home: picking up Sharon for dates, coming over for dinner and other family get-togethers. I always made a point of saying hello and good-bye as I came and went not only because we did it at my house but because I was waiting for a different reaction than the usual nod of the head and a polite, “Hello, Joe”. Many times I’d come over on a Saturday morning as you were cutting the lawn and exclaim an exuberant “GOOD MORNING MR. FREEMAN”. Expecting a similar replay I got an consistent and unwavering, “Good morning, Joe”. All the while I wondered if I was making any progress in making that giant leap, impressing you and gaining your respect. As I was finding out there was indeed more to you than met my eye. Underneath the seeming indifference which lay on the surface was and is a man who loves his family, cares for them in more ways than they or I know, cherishes his wife and treats outsiders, like me, if there were his own. I thought to myself, “That sly dog. And I thought all this time he didn’t like me!”

The last moment I’d like to share is the time about 8 months ago when I asked you if I may talk to you about a specific subject, perhaps we could discuss it over lunch. I drove to your work, arrived about 30 minutes early. I allowed myself way too much time to get there. I waited in my car until the time of our meeting listening to the radio. You gave me a tour of the plant, introduced me to some of your co-workers and off we went to El Pollo Loco about 2 miles down the street. The ride seemed more like 20 miles. I thought we’d never get there. I fumbled through my words, again trying to make conversation, trying to spit out what I really wanted to say. Finally I came out with it “What I came here to talk to you about was Sharon. We’ve been thinking about it for a long time and I wondered if I could have her hand in marriage. I wanted to get your O.K. first. What do ya’ think?” At this point you said something humorous but I can’t for the life of me remember it right now. Refresh my memory. Asking the question was the big build-up to the entire day, I was relieved having said it. All that was on my mind was hearing the yes so my next question was “So does that mean yes?” You reassured me you approved and, as they say in the movies, the rest is history.

Happy 60th Birthday Karl Joseph (great middle name) Freeman !! May you enjoy many, many more.

Love Joe Czech