

James William Kelly Jr.

January 2, 1920 – January 17, 2013

Eulogy by Kevin Kelly

oh time is short, and the days are sweet...

First of all, let me thank everyone for being here today to farewell my dad. I know some of us have travelled long distances to be here. Your attendance is greatly appreciated. I know Jim would appreciate it.

James William Kelly, Jr., born in Eureka, California on January 2nd, 1920, to Maude Oillie and James William....passed away peacefully in his sleep on January 17th, at the age of 93.

So, how to sum up this man's rich, long, and well-lived, life?

I'm taking inspiration from the latest *National Geographic*, a magazine my dad loved. Its theme is 'why we explore', and James Kelly was, in so many ways, the classic "intrepid explorer".

A searcher, a researcher, an observer and student of the world, insatiably curious about everything, with a restless urge to push beyond what he knew, to discover the new, or rediscover the old. In his later years, he explored via the internet--and could often be found in front of his computer, sometimes sound asleep.

Like all great explorers, he had the courage, tenacity and stubbornness to keep going even when the journey became quite difficult. That stubbornness is reflected in one of his favorite cartoons, which hangs in his office to this day. It depicts a stork trying to swallow a frog. The frog's head is in the stork's mouth, but its legs are gripping the stork's neck, trying to save itself, and, choke the stork. The cartoon's bold, capitalized caption is "DON'T EVER GIVE UP!!!"

That was Jim Kelly's approach to life--I'm pretty sure he saw himself as the never-say-die frog, with too much of life left to explore to let himself be taken by the stronger stork.

He was an explorer, and lover, of life to the end. A little story: within the first hour of my visit with him in 2010, he was pulling his latest selection of jars of exotic sauces, jams and jellies out of the kitchen cupboard to show me. I must have asked whether he really needed them all. He just beamed, and said, "Kev, there's this much in the world to taste (*hands widespread*), and (*thumb and forefinger an inch apart*) I've only tasted this much!!!"

Perhaps even more than he enjoyed his exploring, James loved communicating—sharing-- his newest discoveries with others. Who here has not found themselves on the receiving end of his conversations to share his latest find, or opinion?

So, let's remember him for his passion and skills as a communicator, as a lover of using words and language:

As an avid reader, researcher, interviewer....

....always looking for, and wanting to tell you about, some interesting connection between you and something he'd just learned, hoping to get you interested in a certain berry, bird, train track, island, beer, soup, church, street, book, record, whatever--he found it all fascinating. Jim loved talking, not small- talk, although he did like to tell the occasional joke, and enjoyed making people laugh. Remember his huge laughter?

As a communicator of great commitment....

....he had a lifelong interest in civic issues and human rights. Let's remember his strong will, the way he would fight the fight he believed to be right. And his focus--remember the way he would think long and hard so the words were just right? And, how the not so small matter of losing his larynx only pushed him to find new ways to talk--the only difference was that now, instead of 2, he only had one hand to wave around.

As a writer of abundant skill....

....a documenter of life, verbally and visually; an award-winning journalist, an avid and accomplished photographer--I doubt there are many of us here who do not have, or have not been touched by, at least one of Jim Kelly's beautiful pieces of writing, or his striking photographs.

As a poet, and a singer....

....my siblings will remember the silly nonsense songs sung to children and grandchildren--"shlumpty doodley umpty doo". He will also be remembered for the gusto and volume with which he attacked hymns in this church—he didn't sing particularly well, just LOUD! It embarrassed all of us, even my mom, who once asked him once why he sang so loud. His response? It made him feel the song more....and God could hear him better.

As an explorer in the physical sense....

....any of his children could tell some great stories about his habit of getting lost on back roads, vacation trips in a VW bus crammed with squabbling kids and camping equipment. There were also many trips to other countries, including, in 1979, to my delight, Australia.

As an explorer of the world in his professional life as well....

....a tireless, dedicated worker, who would put long hours into whatever the job was, from cleaning up in a canning factory to writing award-winning journalism, to churning out press releases as a public relations officer. I can still hear him pounding away at those keys on the old Underwood as he worked to meet another deadline, share yet another story.....

As a patriot....

....serving actively in the U.S Army for 4 years, in his beloved Aleutian Islands for 2 years in World War II, and later in Korea. He was an officer in the Army Reserve for 34 years, retiring as a lieutenant-colonel. I remember well how, as a young boy, I'd get to accompany him to the Presidio barracks in San Francisco. He'd wear his full uniform and when we'd arrive at the boom gate entrance, the sentry would snap to attention and sharply salute my Dad. How proud I was!

His was a life of service to others. Right up to the end, he was an active member of many groups too numerous to mention here. Most are listed in his obituary, but I'm sure we could all add another achievement--or two.

And now we come to what Jim would perhaps consider his most significant achievements in his life of exploration, how he would like to be remembered.

First, as man of family.

A son, who took on the responsibility of becoming the man of the house at the age of 25 when his father suddenly died.

A brother, of 2 younger sisters, Audrey and Ruth, who are here today, and in whose cherished company he was when he died.

A cousin, to at least 14.

A devoted husband, for 61 years, to his beloved wife, Mary, who passed away nearly 6 years ago.

An uncle, to 11 nieces and nephews, and countless great- nieces and -nephews.

A loving father, to 10 children. And after all that....

A father-in-law, to many sons- and daughters-in-law who have enjoyed (or is that patiently endured?) their fair share of Kelly gatherings.

A doting grandfather, to 22 grandchildren, many of whom are here today.

And finally, a tender great-grandfather, to 2 great-grandchildren.

All of these family relationships Jim valued greatly, and he always enjoyed being in the midst of his often very large family gatherings, generally with a tape recorder or camera in hand, a broad smile on his face.

Finally, James W. Kelly Jr. would want to be acknowledged and remembered as a man of great faith. A devout believer in his God, with whom he has an abiding relationship, and in whom he puts his absolute trust. A man of the church, a founding member of this parish. A prayerful man, who drew solace and strength from his relationship with his church and his Lord.

Importantly, he was also a man who converted his religious beliefs into action. Very committed to his causes, he was a man of compassion. He spent countless hours working voluntarily with the young, the old, the disabled, anyone in need.

From what I've been told about his last night alive, he was loving and living life fully right up to the end, talking, laughing, sharing, making future plans with family.

So, let us mourn the passing of a man of decency, dignity, humility, and integrity, but let us also commemorate him as a great **explorer**, fiercely independent and alive, whose excitement about his discoveries and sharing them will continue to be alive in our lives.