

Icon

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Keywords: Donald A.B. Lindberg M.D., Lindberg family history, leadership

Icon is a glamorous term awarded to a few people for any number of achievements. The meaning of the term, like many things, has a different meaning now than it did or will in the future.

Sadly, my generation's (under 30) perceived icon is personified by someone whose money is primary - and all the other niceties to be an icon begin and end with a monetary value. Accomplishment is measured by nothing other than the dollar.

In contrast, Donald A.B. Lindberg M.D. (my grandfather) was a more classic and genuine icon. In high school, he wrote: 'Naturally there is always something better for which to reach; but if the ambitious person does not stop for a while to enjoy what he has in the moment, he never has a chance to actually enjoy himself.'

Indeed, the latter was something my grandfather mastered. He was true to himself and his interests, and he achieved them. It's so fortunate that my grandfather's ambitions were in the best interests of the world and the people in it because he was unstoppable. From the time he was born until his death, he was the embodiment of accomplishment. He was a collegiate scholar, cowboy, pilot, picture-perfect family man, and an internationally recognized physician.

Moreover, my grandfather nurtured a generational transition from pre-to-post information technology for scientists, health care providers, and the public. To backup, while my generation has known and depended on information technology, our experience contrasts with the pioneers who conceived and developed computing in its diverse socio-cultural and professional forms. The transition was not easy for people (especially those born in the pre-digital age) who did not have the mental acuity to embrace a gestalt switch.

In contrast, my grandfather not only made the change - he embraced and led it. He spent his life integrating information technology and medicine. His contributions to biomedical informatics were as unmatched as the splendid leadership of the U.S. National Library of Medicine under his guidance, which is addressed elsewhere in this book.

More personally, as I get older and gain a more front-row seat to life and its process, I realize the more simple and basic memories of my grandfather are the ones I cherish the most. These include: sitting in the back of an open Ford Escort; eating at Sonic (our favorite); teaching me how to swim in the backyard; or his footsteps up the stairs after a day at the office. These recollections are accompanied by the years I spent visiting the National Library of Medicine and the family of friends I made there.

These are among the things that stand out when I think about my grandfather.

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He was a man who truly cared not just about those in his immediate proximity but persons all over the world. He often said: 'To live life to the fullest also means to make a real contribution to society.' My grandfather's contributions to the world and humanity will be remembered forever and represent both undeniable acts of greatness and living life to the fullest.