

The Quiet Strength of Uncle Ed and Aunt Marguerite



Dr. Jeffrey E. Hansen, Ph.D.

Some people pass through our lives and leave footprints. Others leave foundations. This is written in gratitude for Aunt Marguerite and Uncle Ed, two people who quietly shaped our family forever. Their legacy still speaks, not through what they accumulated, but through how they lived, how they gave, and how they loved.

Aunt Marguerite and Uncle Ed, I wish I had written this before you went to heaven. I truly do. So now I am trusting the angels with the delivery.

They did not live fancy. They lived rich. Not rich in what they had, but rich in what they gave. They were good stewards of the money God placed in their hands. They were careful and thoughtful and diligent. Not flashy. Not impulsive. Just steady. And somehow through that steadiness they ended up with something our family had never even spoken out loud before.

Millionaire.

That was the first time I ever heard that word in our family lane. But they did not start anywhere near it.

Uncle Ed's early life still feels partly hidden from me, like a story with missing pages. I know he served in World War Two. I know he was in the Army overseas. I do not even know exactly what his official job was, but I know this about him. He was deeply competent. So competent that he could rise in rank quickly and just as quickly lose it. He liked a nip of the gin. He did not walk away from a fight. So, he gained stripes and lost stripes and gained them again and lost them again. He was sharp and capable and volatile and very much alive.

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When the war ended, he and his buddies panicked like a lot of men did. The world was breaking open again and they had to figure out how to survive in it. They started working on an idea about structural honeycomb strength. That idea eventually became the hexagonal structures used in airplane wings and spacecraft and engineering feats that once sounded impossible. And Ed rose. He became a vice president. A real presence. You did not have to hear him bark to know he had authority. When people heard Ed's rule, heels snapped. I remember that as a child. That kind of quiet power left a mark on me.

Then there was Aunt Marguerite. Somehow, she saw beneath the wild man. Beneath the fighter. Beneath the volatility. She saw diamonds in the rough. It is cliché to say a woman tames a man, but in this case, it is simply true. She brought out the best in him.



Marguerite, my mom's sister, came from humble beginnings. She spoke French before she spoke English. The Vouga family emigrated from Switzerland around 1910 and settled in Gunnison high in the mountains at eight or nine thousand feet. Dirt floors. No plumbing. Bitter winters. That was her beginning. So, she was tough. She became a schoolteacher. Music. Choir. She learned how to manage a room with eyes in the back of her head. She could calm chaos without raising her voice. She was kind, tough, and fair. A woman of deep internal authority.

Together this bar fighter turned executive, and this mountain-born schoolteacher built a life that quietly changed the story of our family.

Throughout my childhood there were steady voices. Ed was often off and overseas building corporate structures around the globe. Marguerite, by the time I came along, was not so much teaching music anymore as pouring herself into volunteering in the church. She had moved into that phase of life where her strength became even quieter and even more powerful. She rarely fought, but she was always gracious. Always loving. Always firm. She was always there. No matter what.

There were huge family gatherings. Sacrificial giving. Tables full. Doors open. Laughter everywhere. And even though my brothers, the Hansen boys, were a bit wilder than her very well-behaved children, she welcomed us just the same. Her kids were the civilized ones. We were the barbarians. And when the Hansen boys came over, the rules had to be battened down.



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There was the time I jumped off the balcony into a tiny rubber swimming pool with six inches of water and flattened it. There was the time when a rock went through a window. When we showed up, all hell might break loose was always a real possibility. I remember her saying things like, "Drat, you make me so mad." But she never became the mad. She could be firm. And the lessons she taught were unforgettable.

I once made the foolish mistake of saying a four-letter word in front of Aunt Marguerite. I do not remember what I was thinking. I do not even remember the context. I only remember the consequence. Soap in the mouth. Full stop. And trust me, it never happened again.

Yet she was always there to encourage. Always there to believe in us. Always expressing pride when we brought home good grades or accomplished something meaningful. Always without fail, affirming our efforts, our character, and our worth.

When I married my beloved wife Leah and stepped into military life, Aunt Marguerite was still there. They visited us. They would rent places in France, even in Chamonix, places of ridiculous beauty, and then quietly pay for everything. You never went to a gas station with them without Ed paying for the fuel and slipping you extra money. And then there were the family gifts. The benevolence that touched every cousin. Always equal. Always fair. Always generous.

But the deepest gifts were never financial.

They were there when hard times hit.

There was a low moment in my life when Ed came up alone, just the two of us. He said things I never forgot. Jeff, "You have to play the cards you have been dealt. Pity is a bad thing. Do not pity yourself." And when I talked about returning to the Army during a rough season in my practice, he looked at me and said, "Jeff, you cannot go back into the womb." Those words stayed with me. They still echo.

There was also a moment when I was being selfish. We were somewhere in Europe, and I did not want to buy something for Leah. I had the money. I was just being a penny pincher. Aunt Marguerite pulled me aside. Quiet. Gentle. Firm. "Jeff, when Ed and I first got married we had nothing, but we shared the nothing." That sentence humbled me on the spot. Ouch. Lesson learned immediately.



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As the years rolled on, Ed and Marguerite remained pillars of strength for our entire family. They modeled something that my family, beautiful as it was, did not always have in abundance. Stability. Strength. Consistency. And then I watched the final courage.

Ed passed first. Marguerite followed a few years later. Into their nineties. A long life. A full life. A life marked by humility, gratitude, discipline, and giving. And in the end, they gave us one last gift. They showed us how to leave this world. How to die. How to let go.

I never heard them complain. I never heard them whine. They stayed grateful. They stayed thoughtful. They stayed generous to the very end. And that final act, the way they faced death, remains one of the most powerful legacies in my heart.



They blessed untold people. Their benevolence went far beyond our family. They paid for the burial of a distant cousin who had no money and no one else. They brought exchange students from overseas into their home and those students did not just remain students. They became family. They gave quietly. Repeatedly. Without applause. Without announcement.

They did not just leave money behind.

They left a model of how to live. How to give. How to remain steady. How to open the hand. How to let go with dignity and peace.

And that is what never fades.