**Walter John Floss Jr. Eulogy**

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# **INTRODUCTION**

**Attention and interest**: Husband, Father, Statesman, Outdoorsman, Equestrian, Developer, Fireman, Constable, Salesman, Republican, Sailor, Pilot, Veteran, Legionnaire, Captain, Colleague, Commander, Rotarian, Grand Knight, Grandfather, Uncle, Brother, Son, Great-grandfather, Sinner and Saint.

**Reveal topic**: This is the eulogy of a truly great man, Walter John Floss Junior, son of a Walter, father to a Walter, and grandfather to a Walter.

**Credibility and Good Will**: I stood here 14 years ago for my mother, and now I’ll humbly try to do justice for a giant of a man, my friend and father.

**Preview statement**: William Shakespeare wrote of kings and noblemen so I’ll plagiarize him and speak of Walter as a life lived in five Acts.

(transition: first is)

**BODY**

# Act I: The Soldier; a patriot is born.

## It was always expected of him.

### There he is at age one, and two and three, dressed as a sailor.

### His father, Walter Senior, a veteran of WWI, dressed him as such.

### There he is at age 17, an actual sailor.

## A true patriot, he had a strong desire to serve.

### He asked his father to take him to the naval recruitment center on his 17th birthday.

### His squadron was quickly activated into WWII giving him just three days to report—one week before his high school graduation.

### He became an aviation machinist third-class with the PVY Squadron in a flying boat.

### He went on to be a machinist in a BV52 protecting the Panama canal.

## And then, a Christmas miracle:

### There was an accident with a military tractor pulling a plane out of the water that crushed every bone in his foot.

### Amputation was imminent.

### But the surgeon scheduled to do it was sent home on Christmas leave.

### His replacement knew of a new method for treating gangrene with sulfa powder.

### In a word, it worked in an application of science and faith.

### He convalesced for four months with a particular nurse praying for him daily.

### He believed to his dying day that his foot was saved by that nurse and through the power of prayer.

### They stayed in contact all her life.

## He left the navy with the rank of Aviation Machinist First Class.

### Eschewing a medical discharge, he served a full four years in the war.

### And continued his commitment to the Navy as a recruiter for the rest of his life.

# Act II: The Entrepreneur; an empire is built.

## Our father is the definition of a self-made man; he was:

### a tractor salesman, a car salesman, a dog breeder, a registered investment advisor,

### a real estate developer, a real estate agent, and an insurance agent.

### He became an expert at helping people.

### He took risks and won most of the time.

## In the end what he became good at was selling ideas, laws for the common good; which brings us to:

# Act III: The Statesman; laws are made.

## One of Walter’s first jobs was as a gun-packing Constable for the town of Clarence.

## But then he moved to making laws instead of enforcing them.

### Statesmen have skills in managing public affairs.

### Walter was a statesman as evidenced by his words and appearance.

### When he spoke, people listened.

### He had the gift of building convincing arguments enhanced by his conviction in what he truly believed.

## He was first elected to the Clarence town council.

## Six years later he won a seat in the Erie County Legislature.

## 10 years later he reached the pinnacle of his career as a New York State Senator,

### a position he held for a decade.

## He was a champion for small business, less regulation and lower taxes.

### One of his campaign slogans was “small business is big business”.

### He earned the respect of not only his Republican caucus, but like-thinking Democrats, too.

### He was not averse to reaching across the aisle for the greater good.

## He remained a honored elder statesman for the rest of his life;

### *(transition: which brings us to:)*

# Act IV: The Patriarch; a dynasty is built.

## Walter was the oldest of six, son of Walter and Laura and big brother to

### Pat, Joan, Jean, Nancy and Delores who all preceded him in death.

## Home from the war, the dashing flyboy caught the eye

### of a stunning model, teacher and aspiring actress

### one Grayce Thornberry,

### daughter of Helen and Otto, brother to Reverend Robert Thornberry.

### One date led to five which led to a marriage of 57 years and ten children later:

### He’d stand as captain of his ship on Sunday mornings sounding reveille:

#### “John, get up! Bob, Get up! Judy and Mary, get up! Wally and Jim, Peggy and Kathy, get up! Joey, get up! Therese, get up!

#### And we did.

#### Attending mass was not an option it was an obligation.

#### There we are in matching pajamas, lined up on Christmas eve ready to rip open presents.

#### There we are in Sunday suits and Easter bonnets, faces smudged with chocolate.

#### There we are swimming, skating, riding, laughing and brawling at the Floss farm.

#### All caught on film and print by auteur Wally

### Ah, yes, the Floss Farm.

#### The 1800s log cabin he refurbished and added to again and again.

#### The home that grew as we grew.

#### The home where the clans met every Christmas, Easter, birthdays and 4ths of Julys.

### We siblings are forever grateful for him and that place for giving us:

#### Our love of nature and the outdoors.

#### Our love of animals.

#### Our love of boating.

#### Our sense of family.

#### Our work ethic.

#### Our sense of initiative becoming accomplishment.

### And his greatest accomplishment:

# Act V: The Interregnum; Life after Grayce.

## And then, a great transformation through his own personal purgatory:

## Reinventing himself as a widower-father,

## A butterfly emerging from a harsh chrysalis;

## Letting go and taking on mom’s responsibilities:

### Birthday cards for kids, grands and great-grands.

### Acknowledging our accomplishments.

### Being a dapper presence at important events such as weddings and christenings.

### Words like “I love you” and “I’m proud of you” became less rare.

### He softened as a senior statesman;

### His views broadened, becoming more small-c catholic.

### He fostered a greater acceptance for such outliers as myself.

### The great Grizzly Adams become a big teddy bear.

## And there he is, cradling my mother in her last hours of her life,

### Love-birds softly saying goodbye.

### A sight that nearly made my heart explode with love and respect for him.

### Now, they are together again, finally in heaven.

# **CONCLUSION**

**Signal the end**: Before I go, I get to get personal—

Dad and I locked horns on social and political issues. We debated every time we got together. Something happened in those debates; we began to appreciate each other’s intelligence. We’re both news junkies. We both knew what we were talking about. Our journey of mutual respect was long but sure. I signed off with many, many, long-distance cross-country land-line phone calls with, “I love you, Pops.” It was years before he reciprocated—“I love you, too, son." but he did! And just last week greeted my call with a hearty “Shamus!” The friendship, confidence and love we forged for each other is the greatest accomplishment in my life, so here I am with a story of;

**Review main points**:

A sailor, a seller, a senator, a father, and a husband extraordinaire.

He is gone; now it is up to us:

We need to sustain his legacy through loving and being kind to each other.

**Ending “kicker”:**

In the wise words of Henry Ward Beecher,

*“Greatness lies not in being strong, but in the right using of strength;*

*and strength is not used rightly when it serves only to carry a man above his fellows for his own solitary glory.*

*He is the greatest whose strength carries up the most hearts.*

Goodbye, Dad!