

Life stories

A celebration of lives well lived and people well loved
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Al Clay spoke from heart, with smile

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Alfred Joseph John Clay was the type of man who said what needed to be said — but always with a smile on his face and love in his heart.

A gentle giant in pint-size form with a ready smile, wise, kind eyes and wry humour that appreciated how crazy life could be sometimes, Al was the type of man who cherished most the times surrounded by family and laughter.

For 38 years, that included his wife, Christina, by his side and the many friends throughout his life he considered and welcomed as part of his own family.

"He always seemed to turn any gathering into a three-ring circus," his eldest daughter, Karen Slaunwhite, said with pride and warmth.

"Dad always loved a good party." Whether through word or action, Al demonstrated leadership, wisdom, love and understanding.

It's what made him a hero to his family, including son, David, and youngest daughter, Sandra Tout.

"He was one of the strongest men I know. He put up a good fight. Right to the end, he lived with dignity, determination, strength, love and humour," Slaunwhite says, with the love only a daughter has for her daddy, no

matter what the age, but also with the strength of conviction.

He imparted those qualities on his children and grandchildren — Emma, Samantha, Brianna and Clay, who had the "coolest" Baba around.

"Family was everything to him and he unselfishly lived his life for us," Slaunwhite says, adding her father welcomed his children's spouses — Gail, Dave and Jeff — with open arms and treated them like they were his own, whether it was to praise them or give them heck about something.

"Dad would always say what needed to be said," she says with a smile, a slight upturn of the eyebrow and direct gaze that would make her father proud — and giggle.

But those qualities also made him a cherished "dad" to an extended family that is left heart-broken after his death July 16, 2015 at the age of 80.

As the owner of Sandlyn Farms in Baldwin after a 34-year career with the Toronto Star, where he worked as the superintendent of the photo engraving department until his "retirement", Al made everyone who stepped foot on the property feel like one of his own.

"Our dad taught us to compete hard, with fairness and intelligence," says Slaunwhite. "Not only was he proud of Sandra's riding

accomplishments, but he also loved to cheer on Emma, Brianna and any other member of our barn family in the show ring."

He also welcomed anyone at his table. You'd actually be hard pressed to tally the actual amount of teas and good conversations shared at the Clay kitchen table.

And you couldn't miss the affectionate and good-humoured twinkle in his eye and slow-spreading smile that lit up his face and the room when he was about to drop a joke or a wry comment with easy wit and genuine warmth and affection — followed by one of the best laughs around.

But there was also a tower of strength and rock centre of a family under that gentle giant, no matter what.

Even with his health failing during the past year, Al managed to haul around his horse trailer, never missing a horse show or even a riding lesson at the farm.

The "big guy" loved his family, friends, horses and tractor, touching all who had the pleasure of knowing him.

"Throughout our lives, our dad demonstrated by his actions how to behave. He led the way for us. In our eyes, you will never meet a greater man."

That, however, is precisely who Al Clay was, and remains in the hearts of so many people.



Al Clay was a pillar of strength for his family.

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