

Dick Jaqua

Sept. 5, 1930 - Sept. 24, 2019

Let me start by explaining what I'm doing up here. My name is Doug Shick and Dick Jaqua was the husband of the sister of my mother. So I have known him, knew him, for a long time. I have known him since he was a pretty young guy - about 25 years old. While I was growing up back east, my family (my parents and my brothers and I) would come back to this area at least every couple of years to see my grandmother and the Jaquas. Later on, as a legitimate grownup in my own right, I had opportunities to visit Ami and Dick, not frequently, but pretty regularly, on vacations and side trips from business trips. They also came east from time to time, and we'd get together there, as well. The point of telling you this is to describe how I got to know my Uncle Dick, and how I got the measure of him, how I developed my impression of (and I'll say right now, my admiration for) his personality, his philosophy, his way of life.

As I thought about how to do this talk, I started to make a relatively unstructured list of things I remembered about Dick Jaqua, and the things I remember doing with Dick Jaqua, and take a look at where that brought me. So let's start there.

He was a powerful personality, with a booming and theatrical voice. I knew he was an actor, an entertainer, a player and a teacher of music.

He wore suspenders.

He had fun.

The giant rope swing at the Isenberg Ranch, as low-tech as it may have appeared, was an engineered masterpiece of fun. That was one of Dick Jaqua's creations, and a legend in my early childhood.

He got himself an airplane and rebuilt an airstrip that my grandfather had used so he could keep the plane out back. I got to take a couple of flights with him. He flew us up to visit Wendy in Oroville and Aaron in Chico. We also flew to Halfmoon Bay and we buzzed the Golden Gate Bridge. He found places to play tennis near an airport so he could fly from his house up over the ridge to his matches. I had the feeling that, as much as he enjoyed the flying, he also quite simply liked having an airplane in the backyard.

He was a thoughtful person, a thinking man.

He enjoyed, and in fact insisted upon, having deep and thoughtful conversations. I remember Aaron and I entered the kitchen in the Jaqua house on Waverly in Palo Alto one day and Dick inquired about how we were doing, or how our morning had been. Each of us responded "Fine." That prompted a detailed examination of the art and purpose of conversation, of engaging in a thoughtful exchange of information rather than a volley of content-devoid and reflex-driven small talk.

He had a desire - or even need - to know about things, to understand. To that end, he undertook to read the Encyclopedia Britannica from cover to cover. As I recall, that was a multi-year effort and, if nothing else, it provided resources to help avoid the aforementioned reflex-driven small talk, for he was able to expound knowledgeably upon most any subject - and he often did.

He was a creative person.

It seemed to me he was always building, rebuilding, making or manufacturing something. When I came for visits on my own, I looked forward very much to working on whatever project Uncle Dick had going on. He almost always had something we would work on together, discussing one thing or another while we planted trees, stacked barnboard, cast concrete benches, mowed fields, laid out walkways, or hauled rocks.

As I reviewed my list of remembrances, I realized that it made clear one of the most important, also earliest and firmest, impressions I had of this man, one of the things I most admired about him - and that is that he did things he enjoyed. I could say that he enjoyed the things he did, which is certainly also true, but it doesn't convey his purposeful direction, what seemed to me to have been his careful and deliberate - and thoughtful - choices about how he wished to carry out his life.

I'm sure you have your own memories of Dick Jaqua, that each of us does, and I hope that whether mine resonate with you or they don't, they will prompt thoughts of what having known him has meant to you. And in that way Dick Jaqua lives on through each of us.

October 12, 2019