

Jack Donald Brocksmith

April 5, 1938 ~ November 15, 2020

On Sunday morning, November 15, 2020, my father, Jack Donald Brocksmith, age 82, passed away at the Mervyn Sharp Bennion Central Utah Veterans Home in Payson, Utah. He was born April 5, 1938, in Quincy, Illinois, the second child and oldest son of Otis Ellyson Brocksmith and Vera Marguerite Hartwig.

He was reaching for his phone to call me mid-morning as a nurse entered his room. We had an 11-minute conversation. Because of his hearing trouble and speech difficulties following a Jazzy accident in his room last spring, I could not understand much of what he said. I suspected he was calling to ask what time the Chiefs would be on television that day, so while my family researched the answer to that question, I told him, “I love you so much, Dad.” (I normally just said I love you, but that morning I said, I love you so much.) But he wasn’t calling about the Chiefs. Though I could not understand what he said, he spoke with a strong voice, which made me think he was doing well, despite his decline. I assured him I would visit him on Tuesday, once my symptomatic COVID period had officially ended.

In recent months as cancer spread mysteriously through his body, I often judged his vigor by his voice, but less than an hour later, his nurse called to tell me he had passed away. An aide had summoned her to the room just in time to witness his last three breaths. There were two tears on his cheek, she said. I believe they were tears of joy.

Despite having some profound regrets, my father was an optimistic person with an unrivaled sense of humor and a very quick wit. He had a great thundering laugh and a resonant speaking voice. He also had an unhealthy tolerance for self-induced stress and an amazing capacity for enduring pain. He never reported pain from cancer, for example, and he once walked on a broken ankle for four days without realizing it.

Dad grew up in a yellow house on the corner of 14th and Ohio in Quincy. He was grateful for his first-grade teacher, Miss Ellerbush, who took a special interest in him, and for his fourth-grade teacher, Miss Vincent, who made him stay after dark at school one day until he had committed his times tables to memory. When he got into trouble in Miss Kathmann’s fifth-grade class, he defended himself by saying, “It’s a free country!” to which she replied, “It wouldn’t be without the law.” He never forgot that. He remembered sixth-grade teacher, Miss Geisendorfer, or Miss G, as a tough disciplinarian. (Dad would later teach her niece history at a high school in Missouri.)

Though imperfect, there was love and laughter in my father’s childhood home. The “Magnificent Seven” children and their parents forgave each other for past mistakes and remained close throughout their lives. All seven children matured into truly remarkable human beings.

Neighbors Tom and Nell Kinrade, who were converts to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints with no children of their own, took an interest in the family. Tom brought Dad along to hometeach Sister Bliss, who lived

above the bank, for example, when he was 12. They would often cross the bridge into Missouri to buy gas. Dad recalled sweeping cigarette butts from the dance floor at the YMCA, where the branch held Sunday services in those days. Though Dad was not baptized until he was away from home in the Air Force, the Kinrades' eternal significance to my father, several of his siblings, and subsequent generations cannot be overstated.

After getting into trouble his senior year of high school, Dad joined the Air Force as a sort of "escape hatch," suspecting that it would be "a wonderful place to grow up" (his words.) He trained in San Antonio and was stationed in Colorado Springs, Tokyo, Okinawa, and Massachusetts as one of the first IBM operators.

After the service, Dad and three Quincy friends moved to Kansas City, where they shared not only an apartment but also one white dress shirt, which each of them wore for job interviews.

While in Kansas City, he met and married the woman who would be the mother of three of his children: Blaine Stephen Brocksmith (11/29/1962), Cheryl Kinrade Brocksmith (5/22/1964), and Brent Ellyson Brocksmith (8/22/1971). Their marriage was sealed in the Mesa Temple, though it ended in divorce in May of 1979.

A few years later, Dad's wife, Jenny, gave birth to Mark Eliot Brocksmith (6/13/1983), his fourth child.

In total, like a celebrity, Dad was married and divorced six times. His charm, intelligence, twinkling blue eyes, and sense of humor made him easy to love, but he was not always as easy to live with.

Dad enjoyed his relationships with his children immensely, though they were sometimes tumultuous. Underlying all of the ups and downs, we knew without question that he loved each of us, and he knew we loved him. Through it all, he was an attentive, affectionate, and fascinating father who hoped for our happiness and success.

Dad believed strongly in the power of education and its ability to change the future for individuals because this had happened in his own life. After dropping out of high school and getting his GED, he started college as a young father and graduated from the University of Kansas with a degree in history. A few years later, he received a Master's in education.

Dad had great rapport with people of all races and ages. During the divisive 1960s, he taught at an all-black high school in Kansas City. He went on to become the dean of admissions at a mostly black inner-city college, before switching his career focus to sales.

Dad was a generous person who was fond of people and places, but he truly had no interest in or attachment to things. He liked having experiences and hearing and sharing stories. He enjoyed reading history and studying religious doctrine. As his eyesight diminished, he listened to recorded books and enjoyed having his nurse, Mekayla, read aloud to him from The Infinite Atonement by Tad R. Callister.

Dad was a spontaneous person who always had an excursion on the horizon. Among the items found in his bedside drawer was a recently renewed passport, which he hoped to use on a trip to the Isle of Man, Tom Kinrade's birthplace. Dad loved road trips of any kind, especially to the Civil War battlefield of Shiloh, to Nauvoo or Carthage, to Table Rock Lake in the Ozarks, or to visit family in Quincy. These were some of his favorite places. He also enjoyed stopping at the dilapidated Church of the Ebeneezer in Marion County, Missouri whenever we were nearby.

Dad also enjoyed watching movies (like "Zulu" and "Tora! Tora! Tora!"), people watching, playing golf, going to baseball games and football games, and picnicking. He liked dogs (especially Cleo, his Bassett hound in the 1960s), Mark Twain, the musical "1776," and anything pertaining to history, including family history.

Dad enjoyed doing temple work and serving as an online Family History Missionary. As a younger man, he also served as a Stake Missionary.

Dad is preceded in death by his parents; his older sister, Darlene; his three brothers, Gerald, Derald, and Roy; and his son Blaine, who died in April from a sudden heart attack. Dad's grief in losing Blaine was only mitigated by his knowledge that he would see him again soon.

He is survived by his daughter Cheryl (Scott) Acton of West Jordan, Utah; son Brent Ellyson Brocksmith of Murray, Utah; son Mark Eliot Brocksmith of Salt Lake City, Utah; daughter-in-law Jeanie Brocksmith of Quincy; sister Catherine (Dewayne) Smart of Noblesville, Indiana; sister Vicky (Michael) Haistings of Mendon, Illinois; seven grandchildren; six great-grandchildren; and many extended family members.

Dad’s life is an amazing story of falling down and getting up again many times over. It’s a story of repentance and faith in the Savior, Jesus Christ, who is able to redeem us all, though we fall short. Dad's testimony and Heavenly Father's kindness carried him through many trials.

Jack Donald Brocksmith will be laid to rest in a small service with military honors at Camp Williams Cemetery in Bluffdale, Utah on Friday, December 4 at 3:00 pm.