

Eulogy for Owen Jennings Hutto

Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Jeff Hutto, and I stand before you today with a heavy heart but also with immense gratitude and love as we gather to celebrate the life of my father, Owen Jennings Hutto, Jr.

On behalf of my siblings - Dean, Marie, and Darlene - and our entire family, I want to thank you all for being here to honor Dad's memory and the incredible legacy he leaves behind.

Dad passed away surrounded by his family, a fitting end for a man who cherished his loved ones above all else.

Born on September 15, 1933, in Columbia, Dad spent his adult life in the West Columbia/Cayce area, becoming an integral part of this community that he loved so dearly.

Our father, Owen, was a man of many virtues - a loving husband, a devoted father, a doting grandfather and great-grandfather, a successful businessman, and a pillar of our community. But above all, he was a man who lived life to the fullest, touched countless lives with his warmth and humor, and left an indelible mark on everyone who had the privilege of knowing him.

Dad's life was interwoven with the history of Palmetto Carpet Company. As a second-generation owner and operator, he took great pride in continuing the family business until his retirement in 2006. But Palmetto Carpet wasn't just a job for Dad; it was a labor of love that he shared with our mother, Gladys Floyd Hutto.

Mom and Dad were truly inseparable. They worked side by side, building a successful flooring business while also raising the four of us. Their partnership was a testament to the power of love, commitment, and shared purpose. When we lost Mom in 2017, a part of Dad went with her. Yet, he carried on, keeping her memory alive in everything he did.

As I reflect on Dad's life, I'm struck by the depth of his love for our family and his unwavering support for each of us. One of my fondest memories is how he and Mom never missed a single game Dean and I played, whether it was football, baseball, or basketball. It didn't matter if it was a home game or away; they were always there, cheering us on from the stands. Dad had this remarkable ability to make us feel like we were All-Americans, but he was also our biggest critic. Looking back, I realize that his approach made us not just better athletes, but better people.

And it wasn't just sports. Marie and Darlene can attest to the countless dance recitals, band activities, beauty pageants, and competitions that Dad faithfully attended. His support knew no bounds, and his pride in his children was evident in everything he did.

Dad's zest for life was infectious. He loved nothing more than spending time at the lake, taking us skiing or tubing. Those summer days, filled with laughter and the roar of the boat engine, are etched in my memory forever.

And then there were those Friday nights at home, the living room filled with the sounds of Eddie Arnold, Glenn Campbell, Johnny Cash, and Dean Martin, while Dad enjoyed a few cold beers. It was in these simple moments that we felt the warmth of his presence and the strength of our family bond.

One of the most special memories I have with Dad was when I had the opportunity to take him to the Masters in 2011. His excitement was palpable as he saw his favorite golfer, Phil Mickelson, up close. We spent the day enjoying egg salad and pimiento cheese sandwiches, sipping cold beverages, and basking in the beauty of Augusta National.

The joy on his face that day is something I'll cherish forever. It was more than just a golf tournament; it was a perfect day shared between father and son.

Dad's love for his country ran deep, rooted in his service in the United States Air Force from September 1952 through February 1956.

One of his proudest moments was taking the Honor Flight to Washington, DC with his best friend, Wallace Thornton. When he returned from that trip, he was beaming with happiness and pride. It was a fitting tribute to a man who had given so much in service to his nation, and it remained a major highlight of his life until the very end.

But perhaps what defined Dad most was his incredible capacity for love and his unwavering commitment to our mother. Throughout their years together, and especially during Mom's illness, Dad showed us all what true love and devotion look like. He cared for her selflessly and faithfully, a testament to the strength of their bond and the depth of his character. Even in his final days, Mom's portrait remained in front of him, and it wasn't uncommon to hear him having conversations with her, telling her how much he loved her. Their love story is one for the ages, a shining example of commitment and partnership that has inspired all of us.

Dad's love extended beyond just his immediate family. He adored his grandchildren and great-grandchildren, showering them with unconditional love and always finding ways to make each of them feel special. He was blessed with ten grandchildren and eleven great-grandchildren, all of whom lovingly called him "Poppy".

He understood the importance of family and cherished every moment spent with his loved ones, whether it was during holiday gatherings or simple family functions.

One of Dad's most endearing qualities was his ability to connect with people. He never met a stranger, approaching everyone with an open heart and a ready smile. His sense of humor was legendary, and he loved nothing more than being a bit of a jokester. I remember when Darlene got him an Alexa after Mom passed away. I set it up for him under my daughter Laura's Spotify account, not realizing the mischief he'd get into.

One Friday night, while Laura and her friends were listening to their contemporary music, they were suddenly interrupted by "Oh Victory in Jesus" that Dad had requested on his end.

I got an immediate call from Laura telling me to get Poppy off Spotify! That was Dad - always finding ways to make us laugh, even unintentionally.

Dad's impact extended far beyond our family. Together with Mom, he ran Palmetto Carpet for over 50 years, building a successful business that garnered respect throughout the industry. Their reputation for integrity and hard work preceded them, and to this day, people still tell me what a pleasure it was to work with them.

They loved traveling for business functions, visiting places like San Francisco and Canada, and always returning with stories and memories to share.

In his community, Dad was equally beloved. He was a lifetime member of Brookland United Methodist Church in West Columbia, where he served on numerous committees. He took great joy in working in the church kitchen, helping prepare meals for various functions. His faith was an integral part of who he was, guiding his actions and shaping his character.

Even during his illness, when he couldn't attend services or participate in activities as he used to, the church remained close to his heart.

We'd like to extend our heartfelt thanks to the Brookland members who continued to reach out to him. Your kindness was a source of comfort to both Dad and our family.

Dad's passions were simple but deeply felt. He was an avid Gamecock fan, never missing a chance to cheer on the football and baseball teams. He and Mom especially loved attending the home baseball games at the stadium, back when, as Dad would say with a twinkle in his eye, "we had a team." Those back-to-back national championships were a source of immense pride for him.

As we say goodbye to Dad, we're not just mourning the loss of a beloved father and grandfather. We're celebrating a life well-lived, a man who embodied the values of hard work, loyalty, love, and service. Dad's legacy will live on through the examples he set for us, the name he gave us to be proud of, and the countless lives he touched along the way.

He taught us the importance of family, the value of a strong work ethic, and the power of unconditional love. He showed us how to face challenges with grace and determination, how to find joy in the simple things, and how to always keep a sense of humor, even in difficult times.

Dad was, in many ways, a simple man. He didn't seek the spotlight or crave accolades. Instead, he found his greatest joy in the love of his family, the satisfaction of a job well done, and the simple pleasures of life - a cold beer on a Friday night, a Gamecock victory, or a day spent on the lake with his children.

As we move forward without Dad's physical presence, let us carry with us the lessons he taught us. Let us approach life with the same openness and warmth that he did, never hesitating to strike up a conversation with a stranger or lend a helping hand to someone in need. Let us work hard and take pride in our accomplishments, but never at the expense of our relationships or our integrity. Let us love fiercely and unconditionally, just as he loved Mom and all of us.

To my siblings - Dean, Marie, and Darlene - we've lost not just our father, but a guiding light in our lives. But we've also gained a guardian angel, watching over us with the same love and care he always showed.

Let's honor Dad's memory by continuing to support each other, by keeping our family bonds strong, and by living our lives in a way that would make him proud.

To Dad's grandchildren and great-grandchildren - your Poppy loved you more than words can express.

He delighted in your achievements, big and small, and his face would light up whenever he spoke about you.

Carry with you the memories of his laughter, his bear hugs, and his unwavering belief in you.

Let his love continue to guide and inspire you as you make your way in the world.

And to everyone here today - thank you for being part of Dad's life, for the friendship and love you showed him, and for being here to celebrate his memory.

Your presence is a testament to the impact he had and the lives he touched.

Before I conclude, I'd like to take a moment to express our family's deepest gratitude to those who cared for Dad in his final years.

To Gail Marcum, Dad's main caregiver and friend for over three years - thank you for loving Poppy like your second Dad. Your love, care, and patience meant the world to him and to us.

To Ray Bee, who was his companion and "cook" for two years, and to Dian Small and Charlene East for their long hours and care - your dedication and kindness brought comfort and joy to Dad's life.

And to the staff at Amedisys Hospice, thank you for your care and support during Dad's final days.

Dad, we love you. We miss you. And we're grateful for every moment we had with you. You've left us with a lifetime of memories, lessons, and love. As you reunite with Mom, with your parents Owen J. Hutto, Sr., and Margaret Livingston Hutto, your infant son Russell Brian Hutto, and your sister Marlene Hutto Taylor, know that your legacy lives on in each of us.

We'll continue to make you proud, to honor your memory, and to live by the examples you set for us.

Rest in peace, Dad. Your race is run, your work is done, and you've earned your eternal rest.

We'll see you again someday, but until then, we'll keep your spirit alive in our hearts and in our actions.

Thank you for everything, Dad. We love you always.

Your kindness, your laughter, and your spirit will remain with us today, tomorrow, and forever.

Rest in peace Dad, and may you find the solace that you so richly deserve.

You'll be missed more than words can express.

God bless you and Godspeed, as we all say. Amen. 🙏

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