

Eulogy for Emil John Volcheck, Jr.

Emil John Volcheck, III
January 30, 2009

Thank you for coming today to honor the memory of my father, Emil John Volcheck Jr.

My father had a successful career as a chemist and a Research Manager with the DuPont Corporation. He contributed to the development of textiles and plastics that improved lives, like Dacron, a kind of polyester used in clothing; Nomex, a fire-resistant fabric used to protect fire-fighters; and Qiana, a leading-edge artificial silk product related to Nylon that was popular in the 1970s. "Better Living through Chemistry" was the old DuPont advertising slogan. My father believed in that and worked towards that goal. He retired as director of the Pioneering Research Laboratory at the DuPont Experimental Station in Wilmington, the largest research and development facility run by DuPont, and one of the first industrial research laboratories in the country.

My father was interested in astronomy at an early age; He built his first telescope in high school. He joined the Delaware Astronomical Society, the DAS, in the 1950s. He owned and assembled several telescopes. He did astrophotography and photoelectric photometry. A few years later (1958), he became Publicity Chair, Observatory Chair, and eventually President. For many years, he was active with the Mount Cuba Astronomical Observatory. After he retired, he managed the Observatory.

My father was interested in radio electronics as an undergraduate at MIT and worked at the campus radio station WMIT. During his senior year (1951-52), he managed WMIT.

He bought his first personal computer, a Commodore PET, in the 1970s. The technology fascinated him, and he wanted to bring together people who shared his fascination. He founded the Main Line Commodore Users Group in 1982 and served as its president. He was active with the Commodore Mailink User Group.

His curiosity continued through the end of his life. Just weeks before his death, he was learning about podcasts, exploring this technology for audio over the Internet.

In all three fields, astronomy, radio, computers, he did not remain a hobbyist. He wanted to share his knowledge with others. He either took the initiative to bring people together, or he stepped up to serve organizations that were already doing it.

You know, being involved in organizations can be good for your romantic life. My father met my mother at a DAS "Star Party" hosted by Al Webber. (Thank you, Al!)

His passion for sharing knowledge extended beyond talking to other hobbyists and grew into community service as he reached out to teach the public.

At the Mt. Cuba Observatory, he conducted educational outreach programs like Public Nights and often lectured. He helped quite a few Boy Scouts get merit badges. At the West Chester Area Senior Center, he organized a computer club called the "CompForum". He improved the computer literacy and skills of many seniors. In Birmingham Township, he was elected to public office to help monitor and run elections. He worked at the polls for several years.

How did his spirit affect me?

I mean, doesn't every family have a basement with a wood shop, metal shop, darkroom, electronics lab, as well as a backyard with a small observatory?

My father encouraged a spirit of learning and inquiry in me. When I was a kid, he took me to the Jones Observatory in Chattanooga, Tennessee where the Barnard Astronomical Society met. I saw my first lunar eclipse at a Star Party we went to. He taught me to solder and gave me my first Radio Shack P-box electronics kit, a crystal radio receiver. He bought me a HeathKit metronome and gave me pointers to put it together. I wrote my first computer programs in the BASIC language on the family Commodore PET. He brought me along to meetings of the computer club in Philadelphia.

Both my parents were always involved in clubs and organizations. While my father was active in astronomy and computer clubs, my mother is active in Church, frequently does volunteer work, and has edited the newsletter of the Delaware Mineralogical Society. My parents set an example by being part of organizations and helping others.

My father was a good man: a loving husband, a caring father. He had a spirit of kindness. When I was a kid, there were times when I cried at home because I had been bullied at school. My father soothed me, tried to cheer me up and build my confidence. When his father was gravely afflicted by a stroke, my father took me along on a trip to the nursing home in Omaha, Nebraska where his father was being cared for. My grandfather was awake and sitting up, but his mind was gone, and he couldn't recognize his own son. My father spoke to him tenderly and with great affection. That kindness made an impression on me.

My father's spirit of curiosity and kindness, his passion for sharing knowledge and serving his community helped make me who I am. I am grateful for his example and his influence.

We heard Father Martin [Ivanovich] read from the Gospel of Mark. Giving and sharing knowledge is like the gospel story of Jesus sharing loaves and fishes. Knowledge can be taught without diminishing it. Whether you share it with five or five thousand, everyone has the whole of that knowledge, and we all become more wealthy as a result. Let us aspire to share with each other.

Let me close by thanking you all again for coming to honor the memory of my father.

You will honor my father's memory if you never stop learning.

You will honor my father's memory if you pursue your passions, find new ways to reach out and share them with others, and thereby serve your community.

Thank you.