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*Ellen Kurland*†

I read the obituaries about my father in amazement. I wasn't amazed at what a great man they said he was; I was amazed that they thought his greatness had to do with his work and views on the Constitution. To me, and I imagine to others that knew him well, his greatness had to do with his sense of humor, his generosity and his tolerance, not with his academic achievement.

As his youngest child, I made it my job to test his character by doing things such as dropping out of school several times, to making a career as a paramedic in one of the most dilapidated, ill reputed fire departments in the country. Despite the fact that he probably could have named a few professions he would rather have had me do (garbage collector, circus performer or game show host, to name a few) he greeted my choices with love, acceptance and a sarcastic comment.

Although he pretty much insisted I finish high school and college, I learned much more from him than from all (and there were many) the academic institutions I attended. In particular, I remember his response to a letter of mine in which I was no doubt complaining about my classmates at a boarding school I insisted on attending. Among other things he wrote me that I should be more tolerant. He said the importance in people is in their differences, not in their similarities. While it was a hard concept for a high schooler to grasp it is something I appreciate more and more as time goes on.

His scholarly work was important. It was an important part of who he was. But it is his insight, his compassion and his wit that I will miss.

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† The writer is a paramedic in Washington, D.C. These remarks were given at a memorial for Philip Kurland on May 4, 1996.

