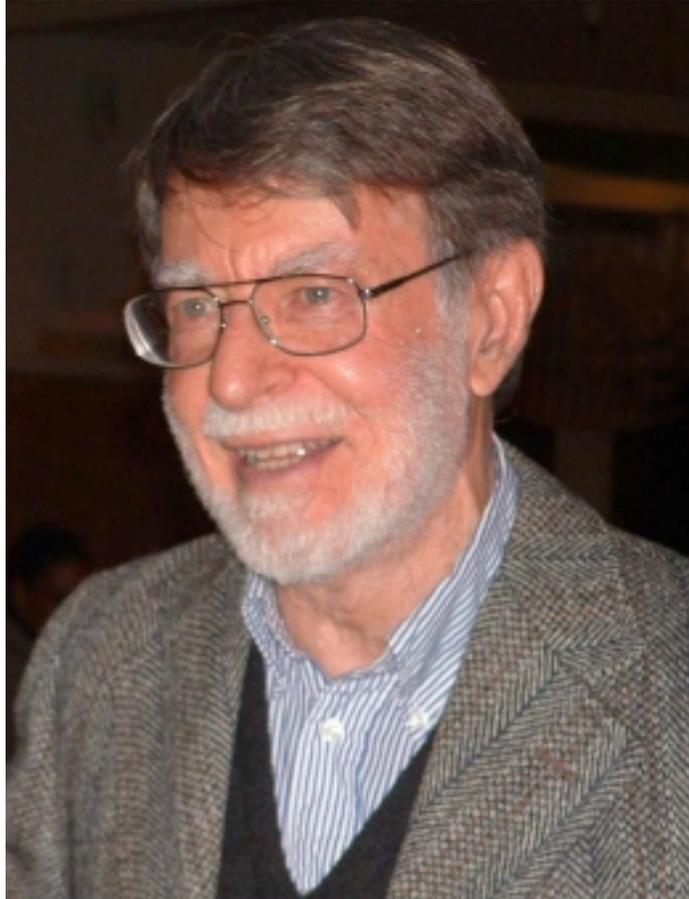


# **Marshall G. Litman**

1 September 1926 - 11 June 2005



## **Eulogy**

By Michael Litman (eldest son)

Presented at Marshall Litman's Memorial

26 June 2005, Davis, California

My happiest memories of my father are all teaching moments. He taught me my first adult joke. I don't remember the setup, but I remember the punchline. It was something about a woman, pregnant with twins, who is overdue, and a doctor is listening at her womb with a stethoscope – he hears two tiny voices saying, “After you, Alphonse.” “No, after you, Gaston.”

I always think of my dad when I hear that corny line – it's so like him – gracious, thoughtful, considerate – in every circumstance.



A few minutes before the memorial began.

My father was a great, natural teacher. Once, when he was preparing for a moving sale, when I was 8 years old, he taught me to letter a sign – I still do it the way he showed me. He taught me how to paint a house. He said, “The last thing you do when you paint is to open the paint can.” He was teaching the importance of preparation – and the lesson adhered.

He was a patient teacher, and he could break a complex task or idea into its parts, and explain the reason for each part. He had a particular way of approaching work, and today, at the age of fifty, when I make a drawing before I begin a project, when I wash all the glasses first when I do the dishes – while the water is still clean, I am mimicking him, and benefiting from his patient work.

When his family was young, my dad had a lot of physical energy, and he worked constantly. He worked in a factory at least eight hours a day or night, and also took college courses. He earned a teaching credential, while growing a family of six children. He also built a houseful of furniture – couches, tables, beds, dressers and bookshelves for his family, in his spare time.

He continued to take classes and earned a master’s degree so he could become a guidance councillor. He also took us backpacking, and he and my mom took their family on amazing, months-long car trips.

Along with his energy, my dad had a relentless optimism – an unbounded belief in the innate goodness of the human spirit – in the absolute equality of the potential of each person. He was brimming with good will, and he never did a mean thing, or had a mean word to say.

My father was fascinated with humanity. He was very interested in people, individually and collectively, and he spent his life studying them, trying to understand them and their wonderful and alien ways.

He used to tell a story about his years on the Ford assembly line. When he started he found the work so brutally boring that he couldn't understand how a person could keep doing it. So he asked a friend who had been there for many years how he kept from going insane, and his friend said: "This job gives you lots of time to think, so I spend days examining one question, and I look at it from all sides, and I study it, trying to arrive at the best answer I can come up with." And dad was impressed, so he asked him, "So, what's the question?" and his friend answered, "How the hell did I get into this mess?"

When my parents wanted to describe somebody to their children, maybe a person in history, that they admired, that they wanted us to admire, they would say to us kids about that person, "Well he or she was a Unitarian without knowing it."

Well, I think that dad was an existentialist without knowing it. I never heard him describe himself by that label, but he knew that people exist alone in the universe, without laws, with no help or hindrance from any God, deity, or value system, other than what each person must make for her- or himself. As an instinctive existentialist and humanist, dad questioned every idea – he mistrusted all received wisdom – every idea had to stand upon its own worthiness.

Since his death I have been sad, and in loyalty to his spirit I have questioned the reason for my sadness – is it rational to be sad about dad's death? He had as long and fortunate a life as anybody could hope for. He had autonomy – he had health – he had wealth and comfort and ease – he had beautiful marriages with two terrific women who were wonderfully kind and loving – he raised a large family and was spared the grief of any child sick or dead – he had to work hard when he was young and he certainly experienced some hard times, especially during my teenage years – but as time went on, he experienced ever more inner peace and by his retirement I think he entered a state of near bliss.

His surgery was brutal, and he spent three months in intensive care on a respirator – but even then he seemed, to me, content, untroubled – he was doing what he could to make the experience a positive one for everybody – him, his nurses and attendants and visitors – and then he died, completing his beautiful life. So what's to be sad?

My dad was an optimist – he called me a few months ago and we talked about this aneurysm – he explained to me about the surgery and the risks involved – at one point I asked him if the doctors had suggested any alternatives to surgery – diet, exercise, drugs? Dad said no – the only option would be to ignore his aneurysm, and to die a sudden death, at an unknown moment, when it burst. He couldn't consider that course – to him it felt like surrendering his life – but, he said, the operation was very difficult, and became more dangerous with the age of the patient – so, he said in *complete* sincerity – he'd be better having it done now, while he is still young.

My dad had no rituals – he had no sense of the purpose of ritual and I think he mistrusted the function of ritual in society, existential to his core. This fact places us in a tough spot as we try to suitably celebrate his life and mark his passing – we cannot rely on pat

expressions, or rites and customs which have served for many others – we have to find our own way to celebrate his life, honor his memory, and way that is in tune with how he was.

He used to tell a story about a pot roast – a woman was teaching her new daughter-in-law how to make a pot roast – what ingredients to add, what temperature to cook it at, how to prepare the meat, and she said, “Now cut the end off the roast like this,” and her daughter-in-law asked, “Why do you do that?” and the women answered, “I don’t know, I’ve never thought about it – that’s just how my mom taught me to do it.” But the question nagged at her so finally she called her old mom and asked her, “Mom, why *did* you always cut the end off the pot roast?” and her mom answered, “Well, I never had a big enough pot to fit.”

That’s how dad thought of rituals and customs. *But*, in some way he was like a child out in the night, looking in through a window to a scene that tempted him, but one he knew he could never experience, because he knew it was an illusion.

Dad had no illusions of immortality – all that remains of my father is right here in this room – in the memories of his family and his many friends, do if he deserves honor, let us honor him by loving each other, by taking care of each other, by believing in each other, by trusting each other, by taking in what he was trying so hard to teach us through his life!



Michael (son), Raviv (grandson) and Marshall Litman  
Walking in Davis, California, March 9, 2005

## Obituary

Marshall G. Litman died June 11, 2005 from unexpected complications of surgery after putting up “one hell of a fight,” according to ICU staff. Marshall will be missed by his friends and family.

In addition to his wife, Joyce Takahashi, he leaves his six children: Laurie (Dale Steele), Cindy (Tony Guevin), Michael (Susan Gist), Todd (Suzanne Kort), Kerry (Edith Tabangcura), and Jonathan (Terri Westbrook); Joyce’s children, Kathryn and Doug (Amelia Rosales) Doi; and his 14 favorite grandchildren, Tristan, Rowan, Toby, Elle Kari, Woody, Ethan, Graham, Rhiannon, Tara, Cody, Raviv, Cristina, Caroline and Calan.

Marshall lived a rich and satisfying life. His passions included family, friends, running (he and his wife met as jogging partners), hiking, travel, political activism, indigenous art and theatre.

Marshall was born September 1, 1926 in Chicago to Louis Lafayette Litman and Ida Girson Litman. His family moved from Chicago to Compton while Marshall was in high school. Marshall attended UCLA, where he met his first wife, Norma Reva Rothblatt. After marrying in 1948, Marshall and Norma traveled to Hungary for an international youth conference—the first of numerous experiences with other cultures and peoples.

Marshall and Norma settled in East Los Angeles, where Marshall supported his burgeoning family as an assembly-line worker and union organizer at the Ford Motor plant in Pico Rivera. After earning a teaching credential and counseling degree at night, he worked as an elementary and junior high school teacher and counselor until retirement. The family traveled every summer throughout the US and Central America. While on sabbatical in 1969, Marshall, Norma and their six children camped throughout Europe for over a year, trapped in a VW bus.

Marshall and Norma moved to Davis in 1991 to be closer to their children and grandchildren, who were scattered along the northwest coast, from California to Sitka, Alaska. After Norma’s death in 1992, Marshall’s primary role was “Poppy” to his grandchildren, until the second love of his life jogged into his life. Joyce and Marshall were married March 11, 1995.

Joyce and Marshall continued to travel domestically in their Adventurewagen and internationally to Japan, South America and Europe. Marshall was involved in numerous organizations and initiatives to make a better community and world, including the Unitarian Universalist Peace and Justice Group and Caring Network, and Health Care for All. He recently taught a class on Wealth and Inequality at Senior Learning Unlimited.

Marshall’s family expresses their deep appreciation to physicians, nurses and staff at the South Sacramento Kaiser 3rd Floor Intensive Care Unit for supporting him in his courageous 3-month battle. He was also sustained in his struggle by many, many friends.

Marshall Litman

## Photos



Laurie, Todd, Marshall, Cindy, Michael, Kerry, Norma and Jon Litman (left to right), about 1966.



Todd, Marshall, Norma, Laurie, Kerry, Jon and Michael, leaving for Europe, 1968.



Todd, Laurie, Emily, Francis, Cindy, Norma, Joe, Jon, Kerry, Michael and Marshall returning from Europe, 1969.



Michael, Joyce and Marshall, June 9, 2005