

## The Edlund Family Story – Behind the Mask

Autumn 2019. Mom would be 93 in October and Dad would turn 93 in November. My siblings and I were happy, as was this couple, our parents. We were all healthy and life was great!



Everything changed in October 2019. Dad had a stroke. He became a resident of at Misty Glen at Cortland Hospital for rehabilitation. My family, their friends and the great staff on the third floor saw him make progress and all their support helped my dad work hard every day to get home. The family gave my dad full coverage with one or more of us at the rehab center during all his waking hours. My mother at 93 was there everyday to see him and make sure he was well cared for.

We were able to get permission to use conference rooms for so many celebrations: Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Eve and Friday Night Happy Hour! Dad's friends have a Friday Night Dinner Club and while he was in the rehab a few of those events got moved to the rehab center. This included a New Year's Eve party. We all came for the holidays including grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Thanksgiving was brought with all the trimmings. We also moved our family Christmas Eve party to the hospital and this included cousins that traveled from out of state to take part. All of this kept Dad strong and working to come home





On March 11, the hospital told us that visits would no longer be allowed due to COVID-19. We tried desperately to make a plan for Dad to come home. My sister and brother-in-law got sick and could not come to help us transition dad home. We were going to need a lot of assistance by health professional to care for dad at home. With the threat of getting Covid, my brother was advised by his doctors to not risk going into a house where there would be many professionals coming and going. I was more than one person could handle safely. Though we would have all loved to have been able to bring him home there was more planning to do before we could do this.

Life changed and it was awful not being able to support our father. Technology helped us visit with him. The rehab center was scrambling to adapt to all the new procedures that the COVID lock down was making a reality. The technology was there for people to see each other via an internet meeting as well as talk with them, but the rehab center needed to purchase the equipment to make this happen and train staff. With the help of the staff, my mother and father were able to “see” each other every day and say ‘good night’ from an IPads. The aides and nurses would use their own personal cellphones so mom and dad could see and talk with each other.

Then my dad’s health began to fail. So many factors stacked against his good health. Family was not there to cheer him on or care for him. We were not able to assist with simple things like eating and follow thru with exercises from physical therapy. I am sure he felt isolated and alone. The staff was trying their best under all the stress of new regulations. We watched on zoom meetings and saw my dad was losing his health. We talked to staff and they were willing to try to give him extra care that he lost when we were locked out. Dad was unable to keep his health without seeing his wife and family.

In early April, with Dad’s health rapidly failing, we decided to bring him home. My sister and her husband were both working at home. Working at home or being at home without work was becoming common with the pandemic. They packed up their computers and came with their dog and cat with plans to stay indefinitely to help. My brother decided that he would risk coming in contact with someone who had COVID to

make sure that dad was home. He and his wife stepped up to be part of the caretaking team for dad. With me already living at my parent's house we made the move to bring Dad home. We were sure that when he got home and was with Mom and all of us, things would get better. But they did not get better. Dad did make it home but with all that the upheaval of the Covid-19 had caused, he was not able to recover. We had less than a week to spoil him and love him and say good bye. I believe that Dad was a victim of the COVID pandemic even without having the virus himself.

The pandemic brought many challenges to friends and family who wanted to support this effort. Travel was restricted and visiting people was not possible. This closed out grandchildren from being able to come and say goodbye. Friends were not sure how they could help either. This was a time where people were celebrating each other with drive by support. Two friends stopped by to welcome my dad home. Because they could not come in and we could not come out to talk, they used signs to let us know they were supporting us. In my friends case her daughter had been in color guard in high school. They stopped by with signs and a color guard salute to dad and for all of us.



Back in March we had lost two uncles and one cousin. Their families were not able to have calling hours or a funeral due to the pandemic. So we were unable to join them in grieving for lost family. In April the restrictions on funeral homes had been changed to limit the number of people that could be present at a funeral. Dad had been a lifelong resident of Cortland. He had been the county treasurer for over 20 years and had involved himself in community boards to sustain and improve the lives of the people who lived here. If his passing was in normal times we knew that the calling hours would have been attended by many. Family and friends would have traveled from long distances to honor his passing. But we would be limiting the funeral to my mother, myself and my siblings and spouses plus the minister. We were lucky because we were able to have a funeral and a grave side military ceremony. The grandchildren and great grandchildren were able to view the funeral from their living rooms but were not allowed

to attend. For us who were at the funeral home, we missed seeing and hugging the many people that were important to my dad but we had the continuity to follow the traditions of a funeral all the way to the cemetery. The grand kids told us later the emptiness of being left on a couch at the end of the ceremony was hard. They yearned for a hug but were not there to hug and be hugged. Two grandchildren did come to the cemetery and witnessed the ceremony there. They stayed far away and did not approach to hug or share their love. We were all so afraid that one of us could spread COVID unknowingly. It kept us isolated at this time we needed so desperately to hug and support one another.

2020-21 was like the Twilight Zone. We all made and wore masks. We washed our hands. We stopped hugging our loved ones. Many people stopped going to work. Children stopped going to school. Graduations were canceled. Weddings and funerals were postponed. My sister and husband retired to avoid the work place and the risk of contracting COVID. We no longer visited anyone inside. Zoom meeting replaced in-person events. This was the time of Instacart shopping and curbside pickup. Moms and dads were working from home and running home schools at the same time to keep their family safe. We didn't go inside stores or restaurants. My family was protecting my grandson who has muscular dystrophy and my 94 year old mom by not seeing anyone and by staying home. People started creating 'Bubbles' that defined rules to live by that would isolate the members from the risk of COVID. These 'Bubbles' allowed people to act normally within them while keeping all other interactions to a minimal. The science was being uncovered as the year progressed. What was safe and not safe kept changing. It was unknown how the virus spread so in the beginning we were not wearing masks and we were sanitizing everything. People would not bring food into the house until it was sanitized. Door knobs and surfaces were being wiped down regularly. We washed our hand so frequently that the dry skin on our hands were cause for conversation. The definition of social distancing continued to evolve. Evolving definitions of what was a safe distance in what circumstance. Masks that were at first not thought to be needed ended up playing a big role in slowing the spread of the virus.





Mom and I got our first vaccination in January 2021 and our second in February. All my siblings and their adult children have now had both vaccines. Vaccines happened earlier than anyone could have been predicted. Side effects were a big concern. But here we are at the end of May 2021, and 50% of Americans are vaccinated and very little side effects have happened. We still do not know how long the vaccines will be effective, but our lives are just starting to open up at the end of May. We are starting to see our friends. Our family is still only seeing people outdoors, even though the CDC guidelines allow for inside visits for vaccinated people. We feel that we still can get COVID and maybe infect someone. We are limiting further than the CDC says to do. The Edlund family does not go to restaurants, or let anyone outside the family into the safe bubble of our homes.



We are getting there. We have hope.

Sharing another story about my high school friend, Mark Twentyman. You will find it in this same archive of stories. We all learned from him how serious Covid-19 is. We understood we really needed to protect ourselves and others from getting Covid-19. None of us had known anyone that had Covid. Last fall he stopped in Homer for a socially distanced celebration of his return to health.