

This would be the last conversation Dave Dunham would have with his father, Lee.

Lee had two questions for his son. First, how big would his funeral be?

Wearing a blue isolation medical gown, mask, and a face shield, Dave faced his father. At the height of the global pandemic, it was not likely that they could hold services. With sensible disappointment and a kind of smile, Lee responded, “I knew you were going to say that.”

The second question, had he given any thought to how he’d spend the money he would leave him?

The answer to this should be easy—a vacation home in Palm Springs.

Dave and his wife Kelly are avid golfers, aspiring snowbirds. They could buy real estate, spend the winter months in southern California, and retire into sunlight and Bermuda grass. Yes, this answer was easy, but it didn’t seem right. It didn’t feel like the Dunham thing to do.

“Dad, we have and we’re going to do something with the University of Wyoming. We’re going to do something in education.”

With a modest chuckle, Lee smiled fully, saying “Well, I would love that.”

# THE LAST OF THE DUNHAMMS

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“I made him the promise of giving back to UW. It’s the most important and rewarding thing we’ve ever done.”

– DAVE DUNHAM

DUNHAM  
FAMILY  
FELLOWS

ave felt the finality in the last conversation he had with his father. In the record of Dunham history, Lee is the last word of its final sentence. Dave is the period at the end of it all. As an only child, without children of his own, Dave is the last to hold the Dunham name.

It was more than a last conversation between father and son, it was much bigger than that. It was every Dunham conversation that had come before, every heirloom of advice passed down, the full weight of it now rested on Dave. In the long stretch of Dunham history, how would they be defined, how would they be remembered?

This existential anxiety is relieved by the fact that the Dunhams were and continue to be goodhearted people who take care of their community. Marvin “Lee” Dunham devoted his entire life to his passion for education. His career spanned nearly five decades, beginning with Platte County School District No. 1 in the fall of 1957. He earned his master’s degree in education administration from the University of Wyoming while teaching full-time. He taught English at Wheatland Junior High School for nine years before becoming principal. Lee then became Wheatland Junior High School’s principal for 23 years and served on the school board for 12 years.

During his accomplished career, Lee worked tirelessly to bring out the best in thousands of students. He took great joy in maintaining relationships with those he taught and those he led.

“The entire lifeblood of a small community is the school system,” says Dave. “The school provides a means of community spirit. I have such vivid and positive memories as a young boy, tagging along with my father to every school activity imaginable. For both Kelly and I, education had such a big impact. Our students in some ways feel like our own children, and we wanted to find a way to help them while honoring Dad.”

Both Dave and Kelly are also educators. Dave discovered his love of teaching later in life. After earning an accounting degree through UW, he relocated to Denver to work for one of the most prestigious accounting firms in the world.

“My dad had instilled in me a true joy of learning,” says Dave. “As I progressed in my finance career, I soon found out that success in this world was not defined internally but externally with competition for titles and money. I was good at what I did, but I wasn’t learning.”

When Dave met and fell in love with Kelly, he realized that although they were



*Kelly and Dave Dunham and the inaugural Dunham Family Fellows.*

the same age, their lives were in different places. Kelly's career as an educator was both enriching and inspirational. Despite his corporate success, Dave felt stuck. In his mid-40s, he realized he wasn't living up to the Dunham name by living a life unfulfilled.

"I had led a life far different than I was raised," says Dave. "I had strayed from what had made me who I was. The two most influential individuals in my life, my wife and father, were both career educators. As a result, I had a tremendous amount of respect for those in education."

Kelly encouraged and supported Dave as he left finance and went back to

school to obtain his teaching license. It was the best career decision he could have made. The significant impact of the Dunham family is helping to support and inspire future leaders in education.

Dave and Kelly have established the Dunham Family Fellows in memory of Lee. The program provides significant awards that support deserving students who are embarking on their student teaching residencies and are in need of financial assistance. The Dunham Family Fellows is advancing the next generation of educators by addressing student teaching adversity, such as housing challenges.

The mission of the Dunham Family Fellows is to support

all education majors on their journey to becoming a teacher, in every way possible.

A passionate user and follower of other people's quotes, Dave cites political scientist Kalu Ndukew Kalu for his words, "The things you do for yourself are gone when you are gone, but the things you do for others remain as your legacy."

"I was 62 at the time of our last conversation," says Dave. "In my entire 62 years, that was the most meaningful moment I had with my father. We talked about how proud we were of each other, and I made him the promise of giving back to UW. It's the most important and rewarding thing we've ever done."