



Goodbye to a father

[Steven Gardner](#)

The Inslee family had sad news today, news I have no doubt weighs heavily on the governor.

On Feb. 7, 2008 I saw then Congressman Jay Inslee campaign forcefully and effectively for presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. The next night, after a day of traveling from a Barack Obama campaign event at Key Arena to a John McCain rally at a downtown Seattle hotel, I boarded the Seattle-Bainbridge ferry. I was tired and it was Friday. The next day I would work the party caucuses, but this was downtime.

I hadn't noticed that behind me on the boat sat Trudi Inslee, but I soon realized it as soon as I heard her husband's distinctive voice. He was on the phone talking to someone about the last couple of days and he hadn't noticed that he was talking within earshot of a reporter. His tone was animated. He was having fun, as if he were talking to a buddy. He had actually moved a few seats away on a fairly empty boat. I listened for hints of the rumors lots of people had shared, that maybe Clinton had a cabinet position for him if she won. No such luck, so I struck up a conversation with Trudi.

The congressman quit the conversation before reaching Bainbridge and he rejoined his wife. I joked with him about listening for rumors. He laughed along with the joke and told me he'd been talking to his dad. He seemed legitimately at peace. Since then I've only

seen him or spoken to him in his official duties or campaigning, and his guard has never been down the way it was that night.

Over the next couple of years I talked to his staff about doing a story on the relationship between Inslee and his dad. But the economy had crashed and members of Congress were fighting town hall crowds over Obamacare. The 2010 election was rough and after that we took our time. Then Inslee quit to focus on a run for governor. We still considered the idea, even wondering if we could make it part of our election coverage in 2012. In the end it proved difficult. We gave up.

My interest in talking to Inslee and his dad was probably sparked by a development in my life. For more than five of the last seven years of his life my father lived with us in a house in the Illahee area. It wasn't always an easy reality for our young family, because my dad, a former cop who also spent years coaching his three boys in the holy practice that is baseball, needed care from us. But even as the work grew harder I grew closer to my father, often pestering him to tell me stories about his childhood. We all knew the time could be fleeting and we did our best to enjoy it. My dad eventually became weak enough that we knew we could no longer provide him adequate care at home and he went to live in a local nursing home. We visited him often, but it will never seem like it was enough.

On election night, Nov. 7, 2012, the night Inslee would learn whether he had been elected governor, my father went into intensive care battling a lung infection that knocked him down. I watched the night's election returns from Harrison Medical Center in Bremerton as my dad struggled to breathe. Four days later the infection would knock him out. He died on Veteran's Day.

There isn't a lot I have in common with Jay Inslee. He's taller, better looking, is a basketball guy, was born and raised here and has always had a better-paying job. I'm not saying I'd trade lives with him. I'm just pointing out the obvious before I acknowledge there is one thing that we share. I could tell from his conversation he had on the boat that night that he loved and respected his dad, just as much as I did mine. And today he misses his dad the way I miss mine.

I don't think I'm shedding any objectivity in sending my condolences to the governor and his family.

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