
F. W. Lancaster: A Family Tribute

MRS. CESARIA LANCASTER, AND CHILDREN MIRIAM MEYER,
OWEN LANCASTER, JUDE LANCASTER, AARON LANCASTER,
LAKSHMI HANUMANTHAPPA, AND RAJI HANUMANTHAPPA

ABSTRACT

This article in the Festschrift for F. W. Lancaster contains reflections by Lancaster's family about him as a husband and father.

INTRODUCTION

This tribute by Mrs. Cesaria Lancaster and the children is included to offer readers an insight into the life of F. W. Lancaster, as husband and as father. It is slightly edited.

FROM CESARIA LANCASTER

Crossing Paths: How We Met

In 1959, Wilf had come to Akron, Ohio and was on his way to the Akron Public Library. He was walking from his apartment and I was walking from the bus stop and we walked the remainder of the way together. Neither one of us was particularly impressed with the other, but as we became better acquainted we found that we had much in common. We liked classical music, opera, foreign films, theater. There was very little opportunity to see foreign films in Akron, so we started a film society and rented the films that we wanted to see. Later, as we became better friends, I invited Wilf to my home for my mother's cooking and my father's wine. I think Wilf thought I would be as good a cook as my mother, so he decided he wanted to marry me (although he tells everyone he thought my father was in the Mafia and he was afraid of not marrying me).

Early Years in England and in the United States

Wilf spent his early years in England. I know that he had a very different life during World War II than we had in the United States. For more than

a year, he spent almost every night in an air raid shelter, as the Germans were bombing Birmingham. Food was very scarce in England, and he told me of a wonderful Christmas present he received as a child, an orange, which was very rare in the winter during the war.

After he came to Akron, he worked at the Akron Public Library in the Reference Department, where all the high school girls who had reference questions wanted him to help them. I think sometimes they made up questions, so they could talk to him. They loved his English accent. He left Akron Public Library to work at Babcock and Wilcox in Barberton, Ohio, and became interested in the new field of *information retrieval*.

Starting a Family

We were married June 24, 1961, and Miriam, our first child, was born in October 1962. We moved to England at the end of that year and Wilf worked for ASLIB (Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaus), where he further pursued his interest in information retrieval. After a year in England he realized that he preferred to live in the United States, so we moved back and lived in Maryland for seven years. Our sons, Owen and Jude, were born in Maryland; Owen in 1965 and Jude in 1969. Wilf taught a course at the University of Maryland and really seemed to enjoy teaching. When his first book on information retrieval was published, he was very pleased to change careers in 1970 to become a full-time faculty member and teach at the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science. Apart from sabbaticals and teaching positions in other countries, we have lived in Urbana since then. Aaron, our youngest son, was born in Urbana in 1973.

Wilf was in great demand as a consultant so he was absent part of the time the children were growing up. But when he was present, he was a big part of their lives. In fact, he was the one the children wanted to shampoo their hair; he was much more gentle than I was. And when the children had a fever, he was the one who bathed them in cool water to help bring the fever down.

A Family on the Move and Growing

Family vacations for the most part were quite exciting, usually to Mexico or some other exotic place. And, of course, we had wonderful trips on Wilf's sabbaticals to Brazil, Argentina, Norway, Paris, Italy, Denmark, and India. Since we were traveling with four children at times, we had an obscene amount of luggage. I remember when we went from Brazil in the summer to Norway in the winter, we had twenty pieces of luggage.

Traveling with Wilf was always a great experience. Since he was the heavyweight champion of library science (as one of Owen's friends called him), we were always treated with great kindness and courtesy. We always had someone meeting us at the airport and helping arrange accommodations for us. Since there were so many of us that was always a big help.

In 1991, Aaron wanted a trip to Australia or India as his graduation

present from high school. Wilf received a Fulbright Teaching Fellowship (his third one) to India in 1991 so that is where we went. While there we met Lakshmi and decided we wanted her to be a part of our family. So Wilf and I returned in 1992, and brought her back to Urbana with us. On one of our subsequent visits to her family, her younger sister, Raji, expressed an interest in coming home with us. So the following year, 2003, we went back to India and brought her back with us. Our family has now grown to six children, and twelve grandchildren.

A Globally Connected Family

As the children have remarked (below), holidays were always a lot of fun with all of Wilf's international students and those international students for whom we served as their host family in the United States. We have entertained students from South Korea, China, Taiwan, Singapore, India, Iran, South Africa, Germany, Italy, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Costa Rica, Greece, and other countries. I think the children and I have really learned that people all over the world are alike. We have different cultures and languages, but we all love and appreciate family and good times together.

Family Pride

I am proud of Wilfrid for many things: his many awards as author of the best book of the year in information science, his selection as best teacher of the year, his selection as University Scholar, and the fact that he was awarded three Fulbright Fellowships, when two are usually considered the limit. But I think the thing I am most proud of is how well our children have turned out, and that they all have a love of learning and reading. And I should add that one thing Wilf is very proud of is that he thinks he knows the first line of more songs than any other human being.

Each of the children has contributed his or her memories of their father as dad and now, for some, as grandfather to their own children. Following are their individual tributes.

FROM MIRIAM

I remember as a child that my Dad did a lot with us. I remember a lot of game playing as a family. By this I mean playing board games and games. We always enjoyed playing games and, as far as I can tell, we all still enjoy playing games now. I remember playing quite a few card games. One of our favorites was a French game called Milles Bournes. Trivial Pursuit was also always a favorite and I remember all of us being amazed (and frustrated at times) with the fact that Dad was always able to come up with the answer. No matter how obscure the city in whatever country the question was about, or some author that only the makers of Trivial Pursuit and my Dad had ever heard of, he always got it. Of course, he definitely pushed the time limits on a lot of them.

I think my favorite memory involving my Dad is his reading to us. At night, part of our bedtime ritual was sitting together on the couch and listening to him read. We read through classics such as the *Wind in the Willows*, *Watership Down*, The Book of Three series and The Lord of the Rings books and the entire Narnia series. When I was in high school I still enjoyed the reading times with Dad. As a small child, I remember enjoying *Rupert*, a book of British stories about a little bear and his animal friends. To this day, reading is one of my favorite activities. I always have a book that I am reading at any given time.

We were never allowed to watch much television when we were children. I sure hated that then. But now, looking back, we did so many better things with our time than watching TV. Of course, I read a lot.

My Father is a very generous man. He supports children in other countries through different relief organizations. I know he gives a lot to various charities. When my oldest son was struggling terribly in high school, my parents offered to home school him, even though it would be a great hardship and sacrifice for them. We took him out of school and every Monday morning, my parents met us halfway between our two houses, about a forty-five minute drive for each of us. They would then take him home with them and give him intense instruction for three days, returning him to our meeting place on Wednesday afternoon, in time for him to be able to attend church youth group. When the home schooling stopped being effective, my father paid the tuition for him to attend an expensive private Christian high school. When he needed expensive medical tests, Dad paid for them, even taking him to Chicago himself for the tests and providing his housing and food for the time they were there. That troubled youth is now a high school graduate and a U.S. Marine proudly serving his country.

We traveled a lot as a family. Sometimes it would be a family vacation to Kelly's Island or Washington Island. But we also traveled internationally. We were in many different countries on three different continents. I think we spent the most time in Norway and Brazil. We saw the poorest of the poor in Brazil and Mexico. Traveling to other countries and living with people with other cultures has given me a whole new appreciation for and outlook on different ways of life such as foods, celebrations, and economic struggles. I remember my Dad defending my brother and me to a taxi driver in London after we had been traveling for close to twenty-four hours.

FROM OWEN

I remember family vacations and the fact we seemed to walk for miles and miles at a very young age. As we grew older, I began to realize that Dad has a terrible sense of direction, which makes me wonder how much unnecessary walking we did.

I remember Dad having to run into the water to save two of us (Jude and me, I believe) on separate occasions on a family vacation.

I remember watching Dad move faster than I had ever seen to rescue his screaming son Jude from what turned out to be a grasshopper on his foot.

I remember all of the guests we had at our house during major holidays and how much fun it was to meet people from all over the world. I have fond memories of playing ping-pong with many of Dad's colleagues and students.

I remember Dad giving us fair warning when punishment was in order. Once, in Paris, we got in trouble for throwing things from our apartment window and were given the option and fair warning of our punishment. This gave us ample time to put on many layers of shorts, underwear and pants, making the spanking useless, much to the chagrin of Dad. On another occasion I was punished for dumping fertilizer down the window well.

I remember going with Dad to see the Sugar Ray Leonard vs. Thomas Hearns fight at the University of Illinois Assembly Hall on pay per view.

I remember a vacation we took together as adults to Spain where Jude, Aaron, and I spoke all of our sentences to the tune of "Aqualung" for the entire week. After a week of being fed up with our juvenile behavior, Dad finally caved in and sang his own song.

I remember my oldest daughter's first birthday party where Dad yelled in shock as she was putting her hands in the cake only to cause her to cry hysterically.

I remember a crotchety old curmudgeon who happens to be a patient, doting, and loving grandfather who is adored by his grandkids.

FROM JUDE

Something that I'll always be grateful to my Father for is teaching me the love of books. I remember that no matter how busy, he always found time to read to us . . . classic stories that I now enjoy sharing with my kids. A fond memory is heading downstairs to Dad's office . . . all of us kids . . . and he would take a break from working to read to us from books like the Narnia Chronicles or other children's classics.

The opportunities we had as children were unlike those of most kids. As a kid, I didn't much like being taken away from friends and comfortable activities to travel abroad. But, as an adult, I look back on the international experiences we were fortunate to have and am very grateful to my father for providing those for us. From attending sophomore year in Denmark to spending a semester in Brazil, the countless things we've seen and experienced are with me forever.

One thing about my Dad that people would be shocked to know . . . back in the day when it was okay to do it, believe it or not, he spanked us!

Us? His wonderfully well-behaved children who were never in trouble. On one occasion, I remember getting the best of him when Owen and I put on as many pairs of pants as we could because we just KNEW we were in trouble. (We're not sure how, but apparently someone threw legos over the balcony of our Paris apartment with the hopes of getting them into someone's soup.) Anyway, I can remember my Dad laughing and actually getting us out of the well-deserved punishment as a reward for our ingenuity!

FROM AARON

The thing about growing up with Dad that sticks out most in my mind was his constant presence. As the youngest child (for the most part), I often joked that, by the time I came around my parents were too tired to care anymore. This was by no means the case. After I began school, Mom went back to work, but Dad consistently rearranged his schedule so that he was home, sitting at the kitchen table working, when I got home from school. Thus, Dad was an omnipresent part of my childhood. Once, when I was much older, Dad, again sitting, working at the kitchen table, asked if he had played with me enough as a child. I have no idea how I answered the question at the time, and I'm not sure of the answer now, but I do know that Dad constantly being there was the bulwark of my childhood. He was there to, among other things, help with my homework when needed (but not math), to teach me to play soccer, or to listen to me practice the violin (poorly). Sometimes, when Mom was away, he even cooked dinner, which always was either shepherd's pie or roast chicken with potatoes. To this day, I can't eat either of those foods without thinking about Dad. His being around all the time has, I believe, helped me today have a strong relationship with him. Some of my proudest moments have been when Dad has respected me and my opinions enough to ask for advice about things. If not for him being around as a guiding figure, I might not be where I am today, such that he would seek my advice, and for Dad's presence I am eternally grateful.

FROM LAKSHMI

I remember playing a lot of "Go Fish" when I was younger. I have done so many things for the first time with my Dad. For example, I went on a plane and I went to the beach for the first time with my Dad. I remember him holding my hand and taking me into the ocean, even though he can't swim. I learned so much from my Dad; he was not just my Dad but he was also my teacher. He home schooled me while we were living in Spain for six months. While we were living in Spain, he used to give me money for candy, and we traveled all around the country on the bus. The first museum I ever visited was in Spain, the Prada.

I have traveled overseas a lot during the summers. I have visited so many interesting places with him. I could not have asked for a better fa-

ther. He took me on my first gondola ride, while we were visiting Venice.

One of my favorite places to visit with my Father is Paris. We have been there twice, and each time we lived in an apartment. I remember going to visit the Louvre.

I have greater appreciation and understanding of cultures because of these exotic visits and travels we have done together.

My Father has always supported me in everything I have wanted to do. Everything I have and have done in life is because of my Dad's love and support, which keeps me going.

FROM RAJI

I remember that when I was a little girl, Dad came to visit my family in India. I ran to him and I gave him a big hug. I also remember that when I was older he took me to Goa, India for a vacation. I read a book called *Little Red Riding Hood*. When we were in Goa we also played games and went for walks on the beach. I also remember lying on my Dad's lap in the plane on my way from India to the United States.

He spent a lot of time home schooling me, when I first came to the United States. Even though I didn't want to work everyday on my school work, he was patient and a great teacher. He had a lot of patience with me when I first learned English. Even though I was fifteen years old when I came to the United States, he read a bedtime story to me. I enjoyed having him read to me.

He took me to my first play and opera. I enjoyed them very much and we still go to see them. He let me watch TV so I could learn English better. And sometimes we will watch TV together.

My Dad is a very generous man. He spends all his time helping my sister, Lakshmi, and me with our homework. He also helps support our family in India.

We travel a lot as a family. We traveled to Hawaii on a family vacation, and have a family vacation every summer.

Commentary by Mrs. Cesaria Lancaster, and children Miriam Meyer, Owen Lancaster, Jude Lancaster, Aaron Lancaster, Lakshmi Hanumanthappa, and Raji Hanumanthappa.