

Uncle Phil

By Eliza Butts - November 29, 2019

My name is Eliza Mitchell Butts and my Dad, David Mitchell, was one of Phil's childhood best friends. To my sister, Olivia and I, Phil has always been "Uncle Phil", not our biological uncle, but our uncle through perhaps an even more meaningful bond—one that was built over time, through shared experiences, love, and the commitment of being there for life's milestones. As Yasmin once beautifully said of Olivia and I "you are the closest Phil has to nieces," and that is a role we are truly blessed and honored to hold.

Phil and my Dad met when they were 4 and grew up together. They attended The Haverford School alongside Gordon Moriarty and Bob Clarke, and the four of them developed a life-long friendship. In the 70's they formed a band called "The Hubcaps" and when my sister and I were eventually born, we grew up listening to stories of The Hubcaps' adventures together. They sang together for nearly 50 years and my sister and I were blessed to have them reunite to sing barbershop at both of our weddings. The iconic blend of their four voices was the soundtrack of our childhood.

I feel such immense gratitude that by chance, my sister and I were born into a family that was close with the Winsors and Millers, and through our Dad's childhood friendship, my sister and I gained *Uncle Phil*—a role model who influenced the formative years of our lives.

Phil was there when I learned to waterski at age 7; he helped sharpen pencils the night before my sister started kindergarten; and he was kind enough to act amused every time he stayed with us, and Olivia and I routinely stole his wallet at our pretend hotel check-in. Because in our creative little minds, without his wallet, Phil could never leave. Even as kids, Phil made us feel important. He played with us, put up with our silliness, and included us in his conversations. I always loved the extra flourishes he'd add to an exchange with someone, it added to the mystique and specialness of Phil. It was never just hello, it was: "hello, *young man*"; never just good to hear from you, but: "good to hear from you, *my dear*."

Four years ago, when my husband and I got engaged we asked Phil if he would consider officiating and be the one to marry us. We wanted to choose someone special to our families who exemplified the values we cherish most. To my family, Phil has always been a beaming light of friendship, love, joy, happiness, humor, class, and so much more.

We were humbled when Phil accepted and in the weeks leading up to our wedding there was a variation of a phrase that Phil included in every email we exchanged -- "at your service, my dear," "here to assist as necessary," or my personal favorite: "Whatever you need." This phrase is indicative of the way Phil lived his life, in the service of others, and it has been a motivator for me in the months since Phil's passing.

Phil created memories that became part of Mitchell-family lore. Whether it was secretly whispering to me, "Here we go, chief" right before I said my wedding vows...or deciding to add the personal title of "Eminence" to my official marriage certificate and legally declaring himself "*His Eminence, Philippus Miller, III,*" Phil had a way of adding his signature Phil flourish to everyday moments just through his presence—by being Phil. I love how he (always seemed) to be leaning back and watching those around him in amusement. There was always a certain

glisten in his eye; a witty-remark at the ready; and then his boisterous laugh, that elevated so many moments in all of our lives from ordinary to unforgettable.

Wistie—Thank you to you and Mr. Miller for raising such an incredible man. As I watch my sister and her husband raising two little ones of their own, I know it is not always an easy task. And to have raised a man of such values, with such a generous heart, is a testament to the love and commitment that you and Mr. Miller devoted to Caleb and Philip.

Yasamin—The love you shared with Phil was effervescent and I love the example you served to me—even from afar—as a couple who met each other later in life, infectiously in love, perfect for each other, and truly savoring every moment and experience together. Your love is a shining example of what many look for but never find, and I'm so grateful that Phil brought you into our life. We are here for you... *whatever you need*.

My family's most heartfelt condolences go out to you, **Phil's family**... to Caleb, to Cyrus... and to all whose lives he so beautifully touched. Our lives are richer and more full of laughter and friendship because of him----Philip. Not just Phil Miller, but *His Eminence*, Philipus Miller the III. Not just Phil, but forever, *Uncle Phil*.

Yasamin has also selected a poem that she has asked me to read as her heartfelt words to Phil:

I Carry Your Heart With Me

By E. E. Cummings

i carry your heart with me (i carry it in
my heart). i am never without it (anywhere
i go you go, my love; and whatever is done
by only me is your doing, my love)

i fear

no fate(for you are my fate, my **sweetie**) i want
no world (for beautiful you are my world, my true)
and it's you are whatever a moon has always meant
and whatever a sun will always sing is you

here is the deepest secret nobody knows
(here is the root of the root and the bud of the bud
and the sky of the sky of a tree called life; which grows
higher than soul can hope or mind can hide)
and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart

i carry your heart (i carry it in my heart)

I love you forever – it's just you and me sweetie.