The first thing I’d like to mention is Dad’s total and absolute devotion to truth. “Devotion” in a way, does not capture it. Dad was – almost literally -incapable of being untruthful. He could not bear living with deceit, covering things up, or not facing what he saw and felt to be true: and I mean truth in all its manifestations: factual truth, emotional truth, aesthetic truth. Crucially for him, these were inseparable. A fact, known as a fact, but without connection to some inner emotion, was, in some sense, not “true”. When factual truth was divorced from emotional truth, my father loved to use the verb “spout”. “He is just spouting things.” He would say. Or he would talk about someone being “stuffed” with facts or information. This attitude was encapsulated by a quotation from “Crime and Punishment” he had pinned to the board in front of his desk: “To talk nonsense in one's own way is better than to talk sense in someone else's. In the first case you are a man, in the second you're no better than a magpie.”

Part and parcel of this devotion to truth was deep respect for others’ freedom. Freedom that could enable them to find emotionally engaged truth. This meant that he certainly didn’t want to be someone stuffing or indoctrinating others.

Friends’ anecdotes, biographies, literature are full of examples of fathers who leave behind them a trail of sayings and maxims that they try to imprint on their children and hope they will lead their lives by. I don’t have such a storehouse that allows me to start sentences with, “As my father always used to say . . . . “ The only such saying I do remember is one that was not really his own, but was told to him by a travel writer, called Rosita Forbes, who was a guest at my grandparents’ house when my dad was young. She said to him, “Don’t put yourself down Neville! . . . . . Everyone else will do that for you!”.

Apart from that, though, he never had a huge stock of advice on work, life, marriage, bringing up children etc etc. This was partly this respect for other’s freedom, but that, again, doesn’t quite describe it correctly, because it implies, which definitely wasn’t the case, that he was deliberately holding back. It implies that there were a whole lot of harangues, moralizing lectures or jaded sayings that could have come out, but didn’t. In fact, they weren’t there to hold back. Because there was something in him that revolted against ever reducing human experience to an aphorism – no matter how clever. For him the person, and the experience actually in front of him was ever-new, a phenomenon to be observed – not to be shoe horned into some pre-given assumption or category. Being cynical, jaded or superciliously and superficially “wise” about life was just completely absent from him. When old age did catch up to him, and made him repetitive. He repeated stories and jokes, not “rules for life”. But this is not to imply wishy washiness. I don’t think he has ever been accused of that! He was an incredibly powerful personality – particularly in his dislikes. He hated anything petty and mean spirited, or bureaucratic. And as a son, his powerful condemnations of certain things could feel overwhelming at times. But even his intolerance tended to be targeted against whatever he perceived to be an imprisoning or chaining force. So what he really instilled was a deep sense of freedom and a sense that life was a universe of possibility.

When I was young, some of my really vivid memories are of times Dad was literally trying to show me how big the universe was. When I a small boy, Dad bought two things for the house: a microcope, and a telescope. They were never used as much as he had probably intended. But I remember vividly happy weekends spent looking at tiny insects, or trying to find Jupiter’s moons. What I remember more about those moments than anything else was his infectious enthusiasm and this sense that as we looked at some miniscule arachnid or distant galaxy, we might really discover and realise something new: something that no-one had thought about or seen before.

In later life, the telescope and the microscope were put away. Their role was replaced by conversation. I left home back in 1998, when I was 18, and have never lived in Australia since. Trips home, or to other parts of the world to meet him, were always just settings for conversation: topics ranged across history, politics, news, philosophy, or theology. For him the subjects were never dry, academic or intellectual. He would always attack them with huge emotional energy. Again, there was always this sense that we might, together, see something new. The world always seemed bigger and richer afterward those conversations. That was one of his many massive gifts to me.