Yesterday's Father-in-Law
By Zack Pelta-Heller

David was a wonderful father-in-law and a phenomenal grandfather to my kids, Harold and Sage. I feel incredibly grateful that we enjoyed such a close bond as a family for so many years. He was also warm and witty, with a whimsically wicked sense of humor. He relished delivering jokes—at family gatherings, with friends old and new, and at dinner parties—which he'd clearly spent a lot of time crafting. So in a tribute to David, I've prepared a remembrance, which I'll try to keep light.

One of David's proudest jokes, which I heard him retell many times over the years, went something like this. When David's own father-in-law, Zayda, passed away, he and Wendy began going through the closets in Bubs and Zayda's apartment, gathering up Zayda's clothes for donation, as is the Jewish custom when a close family member dies. Though Zayda and David weren't the same size, some of Zayda's clothes apparently fit David. At the shiva, someone came up to David and said, "That's a nice suit! Is it Today's Man?" To which David smiled and replied, "No, it's yesterday's father-in-law!"

That joke came back to me in the days following David's passing. Anna, Abe, Wendy, and I began sorting through David's belongings. We gathered his jackets, coats, and sweatshirts—all of which had pockets full of loose cough drops and empty green poop bags, which he used for the many walks he loved taking his dog Selma on around Rittenhouse Square. We emptied David's nightstand drawers, which were again, littered with loose cough drops, as well as toothpicks, baseball cards, old business cards, artwork from my kids, small momentos from family trips, and even a couple of empty poop bags—for whatever reason.

We decluttered shelves and closets, filling large trash bags and baskets full of shirts, pants, shoes and sneakers, and lots and lots of tchotchkes, which Abe and I then loaded into the trunk of my car so I could donate them to Goodwill. We even used their schlepper cart to haul everything downstairs, as David would've wanted. As I loaded the last basket into the back seat of my car, which contained some old books, stuffed animals, and novelty toys, I suddenly heard a muffled voice cry of "Hey—my bad!"

Startled, I looked down and saw a blue plastic button with the word “Sorry!” written in white. This was a knockoff of the red Staples’ “That Was Easy” button,” which once sat next to the “Sorry!” button on the same bookshelf in their apartment, and which was also in the basket of items being donated. I started laughing. Then I told Abe, and he started laughing.

“Hey—my bad!” seemed like a joke that was purely David. He was forever trying to make us laugh and put us at ease while maintaining his comic timing. He was yesterday's father-in-law—forever remembered fondly.