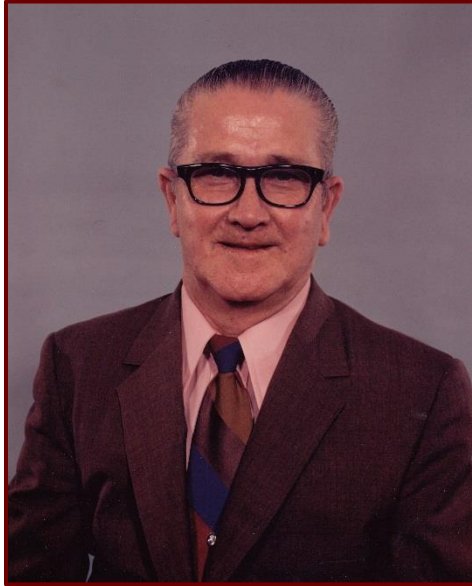


A Father, A Teacher

He was born on Feb. 22, 1910, and he was proud that he shared his birth date with George Washington. He had to drop out of school in the third grade to help his father eke out a living on a rented farm.



The days were long and the work was hard, with livelihood depending on crops and a variable yield determined by uncertain weather and the degree of their labor. By the time he was 20, the Great Depression had begun, and economies of nations around the world were devastated. Construction was virtually halted in many countries, and farming and rural areas suffered as crop prices fell by about 60 percent.

To survive, he moved his young family into a small town and got a job at a lumber mill. The pay wasn't much, but it was steady. Eventually, saving money as he could, he followed a dream and established his own barber shop, a trade he followed until retirement.

He was my father, Wiley Waymon Hunter. And although he had little in the way of public schooling, he became an important teacher to me. He taught me:

- *Respect for the land.* Although the toil was demanding, he seemed to thrive on the discipline and techniques required to plant and grow and reap the produce. The satisfaction on his face at harvest time reflected his pride in what had been accomplished.
- *Appreciation for animals and their importance in our lives.* Cows, horses, chickens and hogs all were an integral part of life on the farm. And the way he could manage and direct mules as he plowed fields and dragged fallen trees to expand a pasture and provide firewood was something to behold.
- *The value of a strong work ethic.* Daddy's days on the farm began about 4:30 every morning in order to feed the livestock and the chickens and to milk the cows. At the lumber yard, he worked six days a week, and he kept long hours in the barber shop to accommodate his customers.
- *The therapy of humor.* My father loved a good story, both in the telling of one and in hearing one, and he had the ability to lighten the mood that tough times could bring. His hearty laughter will always echo in my mind.
- *The need for recreation.* Daddy loved to swim in the clear, cool waters of a spring-fed pond on the farm. And a fishing trip with his boys, complete with cane poles, fish hooks and bait, was a pure delight.

(more)

- *The urgency of some quiet times for meditation.* I enjoyed sitting beside him in the seat of a horse-drawn buggy on those trips into town for supplies, and his reflection – perhaps of the status of the corn, or what his boys needed for school, or wondering how much longer it would be before the rain came – was understood and uninterrupted.
- *The blessing of faith.* The inspiration of Daddy's dedication to his Lord and the church still burns within me, and it will for the rest of my life. He was a Baptist deacon who believed that when the church doors were open, we should be going in. But he practiced his spiritual convictions every day of his life, and he became a model for me and my brothers.
- *The imperative of sharing with others.* Even though our family did not have a lot of discretionary income, Daddy frequently gave of the yield from his sizable garden to neighbors and made a practice of selling a portion of his produce to give money to mission causes.

My father died in 1985. Despite his physical absence, Father's Day will be a time of reverie – and gratitude – as I think about my dad and what he meant to me. Many of you, like me, have fathers who have gone on, and Sunday will be a trip down memory lane.

But if your father is still living, don't miss the opportunity to gather around him with other family members and thank him for his sacrifices on your behalf. Or if that is not possible, deliver that message by telephone.

It will make his day – and yours – happy indeed.

– Beecher Hunter

