

Remembering Daddy

It was Aug. 10, 1985, when Lola and I walked into Room 407 of Cookeville General Hospital where my father had lain for a month after suffering his sixth stroke. On this day, he had just passed away. I put my arms around my mother. Her face was buried in the sheet beside the still form, and she sobbed uncontrollably. She needed to cry. We all did.

Through the tears, I looked at this body that had been wracked with pain and suffering for a long while. Nobody – not the doctors or nurses or even the family – thought he would survive the first few hours after that severe stroke.

I looked at his silvery hair, gleaming under the hospital lights. He was a barber for most of his life, and he still had lots of it, even at the age of 75. He took pride in his appearance, and good grooming was always a part of that.

I looked at his legs, outlined under the sheet. They were muscular legs, legs that took us on walks through the woods, legs that kicked up the water in the pond on our farm at the end of a hot, summer day as he showed me how to swim.

I looked at his arms – arms that picked me up from a pile of lumber beside the barn after I had stepped on a rusty nail and carried me to the house for treatment of the wound. They were arms that hugged me when I graduated from high school and college – the first of my family to even go to college.

I looked at his hands – hands that taught me how to bait a fish hook, hands that helped me reel in my first catch – a snapping turtle. They were hands that held the reins of a horse as we rode in a buggy into town to buy supplies and had long talks about life and its hardships. They were hands that wielded a razor strap when I needed disciplining. They were hands that showed me how to pick beans and strawberries and to dig potatoes. These were the hands that helped build the Westview Baptist Church, where he was a charter member and a deacon.

I looked at his eyes – those blue eyes my mother was always talking about. They were eyes that mirrored the depths of his heart, such as when he told me, “I love you, son,” a few days before he died.

I looked at his mouth, now partially open as he had gasped for his last few breaths of air. From those lips had come a commanding voice throughout his lifetime. He was a man in charge, and he knew what he was doing. and his voice reflected it. There was authority in his voice, but also tenderness.



(more)

In the long vigil by his bedside over the past few weeks, the family observed that sometimes he was cognizant of where he was and what was transpiring, and sometimes he was not.

One afternoon, about three weeks earlier, he turned his head in the hospital bed and said to me, “Son, is today Christmas?” Some would deduce that it was a crazy or far-out question, but I understood what made him ask it. Christmas was always a big event in our family – and particularly since all three sons had married and moved away. It was a time of family togetherness. He surely must have looked up from his bed, saw the family around him and wondered, indeed, if Christmas had slipped up on him. Since he had suffered his first stroke, he would always say at the family Christmas dinner, “Let’s all enjoy each other this year; it may be the last Christmas we’ll all be together.”



Later that same day, he looked at me and said, “I hear voices on the front porch, son. Who is it?” I understood that, too.

As we boys were growing up, the front porch was a pivotal institution. We gathered there after the day’s work or play was over. Daddy usually sat in the swing or on the floor, propped up against a porch post. In the cool of the evening, we relished each other’s company. We talked about the day, what it had brought in the way of pleasure or disappointments. We talked about our dreams and aspirations.

The front porch was the prelude to a night of rest and a new day ahead.

The attendants came to take his body away, and snapped me out of my reverie.

“Daddy,” I said to him deep in my soul, “your long night of suffering is over. You’ll be better in the Great Morning you are beginning.”

Remembering, you see, for my father and for me, was so important – and especially for me in that moment in time.

Sunday is Father’s Day. Celebrate it with your father by revisiting with him some of those special memories. It will do you both a world of good. If he has already passed on, as has my father, then tell a friend about some things he did that helped shape your life. You honor him by doing so.

The memory of the righteous is a blessing (Proverbs 10:7 ESV).

– Beecher Hunter