

In memory of Wallace M. Kunkel

“My Dad”

by his son, Bruce



“God's in his heaven and all's right with the world,” he said on our last good-bye, as he said so many times before to me. But that was my Dad. He possessed an indomitable spirit and was able to find good in any circumstance.

I knew when I woke up on Saturday morning the 6th of April, a rainy unsettling day, it would be his last and I was grieving already. Unable to be with him, and in an effort to overcome my frustration, I decided to take samples of my work around to local merchants to “drum up” some business, much the same as Dad had done so many times. Everything I know about salesmanship I learned from watching him. And so I walked in his shoes (or cowboy boots) all that rainy day and spoke as he would have; always very proud and with a certain farm boy dignity and yet humble and respectful, able to look a man in the eye and shake hands with his soul. “Presentation is everything,” he'd always say, and so I had done my best work and put it in a leather valise just about like the one he had used on such occasions.

He could be formal, but never stuffy. If he wore a suit he'd always finish it out with an American Indian string tie, a pair of Western boots, and his much loved Mr. Sawdust belt buckle. He'd always shake hands when he met you. I learned that from him too. “You can always tell a lot about a man by the way he shakes hands,” he would say. I believe that too.

I spent much of my life trying to make my Dad proud of me, and he was proud of me and told me so often. Even in his last days when he was sick and had so much else to think about he reached out of his pain and troubles and found something kind to say. He was a man much bigger than his circumstances. He was a man who possessed great vision, imagination, and insight. He inspired me and many others, and freely gave of his knowledge and wisdom, even though at times there were no takers.

“We have had a very rare experience,” he would say. And I would agree. Few fathers have taken so much time with their children and few children have been

willing to learn from their fathers for so long. When I look back on thirty years of working, my very best memories were with my Dad. We worked with all our might. "Hands to work and hearts to God," he would say. He never did anything halfway, it was always all the way or not at all. "Anything worth doing, is worth doing right," was his motto. He said he'd rather leave behind a few pieces of fine furniture than a tombstone and he succeeded in doing that and much more.

He wrote a fine novel of his early years in Missouri entitled, *A Missouri Incident*. He wrote the definitive text on the use of the radial arm saw; a machine on which he was the grand master and without peer. He researched the genealogies of several families and developed a method of identifying generations that is unique in that field. He completed the work begun by his mother entitled "Our Kunkel Family In America," a collaboration of fifty years. He fathered six boys and one girl and remained a faithful husband and father through the great times and the great adversities of fifty years. And there is so much more I could tell you.

He never ran out of ideas, he just ran out of time. He worked as if there were no tomorrow, often working through the night and always with an intensity that amazed me.

He was a thoroughly modern man, always excited about the next new development, "A better mousetrap," he liked to call it. He loved his 18th century furniture and was a student of all the best of the past and yet he became very competent on the computer in his later years and was excited to share new things he was learning. He never stopped learning. "If I don't learn something new everyday," he would say, "then the day was wasted."

From my earliest recollections of childhood, we would all go to church together. I loved to stand beside him in church and sing hymns, because he had a beautiful voice. He had a wonderful tone and great control, probably from his many years as a concert trumpet player. That was a phase of my Dad's life that was about over as we were born. He was a well known musician in the midwest and had wonderful dance bands back in his University of Kansas days. Many times he would type and print out the lyrics of my songs for me and always encouraged me to keep on writing. "I've never heard anyone better than you, Bruce," he'd say. And though I have no delusions about my musical ability, I really think he meant that. I may never have commercial success as a songwriter but to my Dad I am a success and that means far more to me.

Shortly after he gave his life to Jesus Christ, I found our Lord too and that fact was perhaps the greatest thing we had in common. We shared the same faith and as the years have rolled by that faith has become more and more important.

I don't know where I would be today without my faith in God and I'm sure my parents' prayers played a large roll in my salvation. But because of that faith we held in common I do know where my Father is today. He's gone home today, to be with his Creator. And I know that in my heart.

When the call came early Sunday morning, I was sad and relieved. He was finally free. No more pain, his blindness lifted, no longer bound by a hospital bed and failed health. Dawn brought the most lovely spring day I had ever seen. I stood in my back yard in Tennessee amid blossoming trees and the songs of nesting birds and gazed up at the clear blue sky and said, "Good for you, Dad, good for you." And although I was so happy for him I felt lost with my dear friend gone away.

Elizabeth took it especially hard. She didn't see him often but he always made her feel so special, and she loved her Grandpa. She cried inconsolably and as I comforted her I told her that Grandpa saw great things in her and was so proud of her and that she should always do her best everyday to become the very best person she could be, because he would want nothing less for her, nor expect anything less of her.

And now, after returning home and sharing stories about Dad with friends and family, I hear the same things over and over. My Father had the ability to make each one of us feel special. He made us feel that he was genuinely interested in whatever we endeavored to undertake. Each one of us was his favorite. He was proud of everyone of us and expected us to do great things, and to always do our best. I believe we owe this remarkable man no less. He would want nothing less for each of us.

The last thing I said to my Dad on our final visit was, "I'll see you again." He smiled at me and replied, "Yes... yes you will."

I imagine he's very busy in his new home. So many wonderful people to meet, ancestors from ages past to talk with. I imagine he'll want to prepare a place for each of us up there too. I think he'll be playing his horn again with his Dad just as he did in the New Point Band when he was a young man. I can picture the two of them among a great multitude of saints, praising the Almighty God.

"God's in His heaven and all's right with the world," my Dad always said. And Heaven must be a wonderful place because that's where my Dad is.