

One empty ice cream bowl...

By RAGAN HELMS

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As I entered my grandparents' house the same familiar smell reached my nose and filled my memories. Only, this time their house was much more calm and gloomy. Walking into the den I saw my granddads empty chair and all that remained was an impression in the cushion from where he used to sit. This is when I realized that there was no escaping reality. (1)

Earlier that same morning I had received a call on my cell phone. With my eyes still stuck closed from the night's rest I struggled to look at the clock, it read 6:15. Immediately I knew, and with a lump in my throat I answered my phone. My idea was confirmed when I heard the words, "Granddaddy's gone to heaven," said my mom. (2)

For as far back as I remember my granddad sat in that soft, maroon, recliner. It was one of his favorite places to be. I think about him sitting in that chair watching all of his grandkids running around,

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sitting in that chair in the mornings to greet me with “morning sunshine,” sitting in that chair laughing to old shows like “All in the Family.” (3)

When I think about my granddad I think about the farm. After all I had called him “granddaddy farm” for years to differentiate him from my other granddad. He taught me so much on his farm, how to pick corn and peas, how to fish, and most of all how to love the farm like he did. My granddad was known for his delicious fruits and vegetables and people who knew him anticipated receiving the great food from his farm, which he gave out so generously. He was very smart on the farm because he grew up learning about farming. On May 24, 1924 he was born to James Ollie Helms and Eva Lena Byrd on a farm in Enterprise, Alabama. He worked on the farm every day, often early in the morning before he went to school. (4)

Granddad wasn’t just smart on the farm; he was an intelligent guy all around. When I think about my granddad I think about someone who is sharp. He attended Emory University and Georgia Tech before graduating from Auburn University in 1948. He joined the Navy during World War II and served for three years. While still in officers training he decided he better go marry my grandmom before someone else caught her attention. I told you he was a smart guy! So over the Christmas holidays, in 1945, he and my grandmother got married. (5)

Following his graduation from Auburn he went on to work for the University. He managed a farm for the Auburn agriculture department where students could come and learn first hand about farming and agriculture. His own kids loved this, “It was great because we got to get fruit from the orchards and ride around the farm in the back of the truck,” explained my dad. My granddad worked for Auburn for 13 years. (6)

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So as National Grandparents Day approaches all of these memories of my granddad are fresh in my mind, as it has only been about 4 months since his passing. Grandparents Day first began in 1973 and is celebrated on the first Sunday after Labor Day. It was established as a family day, a day to get together and honor your grandparents. This particular holiday gives grandparents the opportunity to show their love for their grandchildren and vice versa. It also serves as a way to help children learn about the strength, information, and direction a grandparent can offer. (7)

Although this Grandparents Day I don't have my "granddaddy farm" to talk to, he doesn't feel that far away. Every day I remember the important things that he taught me. One characteristic that I try hard to imitate is his carefree attitude. I would ask him "What about this," or "What would happen if..." "Ah don't worry about it," was always his response. His relaxed attitude about things always made us laugh, especially my grandmother. (8)

When I think about my granddad I think about strong and wise, so when he got sick it was hard to see him opposite of that. It was around my freshman year at Auburn that he began to get sick. It's like his mind just quit. At first he just began to forget little things or get confused, but things only got worse. He was frail and vulnerable, not the granddad I knew. He was weak, both physically and mentally, and only when he saw my grandmom would his eyes get wide and bright. Well, my grandmom and ice cream. He had lost his appetite and ability to eat by himself, but one thing that my granddad never turned down was a bowl of chocolate ice cream. In the same old, small, striped bowl that he had always used, he could still devour a bowl of chocolate ice cream with hardly any problems! (9)

The last time I saw my granddad he was so thin and weak that he was almost unrecognizable. The only part I recognized was his big, strong, hands. His plaid, button up shirt hung off of his frame so

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loosely and his face sunk in. "Ok granddad I'm going back to Auburn now" I said loud and clear. "That's a good place" he replied as he struggled to get the words out. (10)

When I think about my granddad I think about his chair, I think about his wisdom and strength, and I think about the farm. When I think about my granddad I think happy-go-lucky, chocolate ice cream, and Auburn. I don't think about the sick, confused granddad that I saw for the past year because that's not him. (11)

On this years Grandparents Day I think about the husband, dad, and granddad that we all loved. The one that made us laugh. The one that always sat at the kids table during family dinners, because he loved to listen to his grandkids talk. The one who made sarcastic comments, making us laugh out loud. The one who taught us what love really was as he called for my grandmom to be by his side, when he could hardly talk at all. (12)

As we sit in my grandparents' house looking at black and white pictures of days gone by, we all smile. This is how I know that my grandmother and the rest of my family are remembering and missing that same granddad too. (13)

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