



This Father's Day Let's Reflect on Who Taught Us and On What We Teach Others

Description

I was asked the other day that if I could meet anyone, who would I like to meet with? And there are so many people I'd like to meet with, but my grandfather's name popped up first. With Father's Day coming up Sunday, I thought it might be good to write about him in this week's column.

My paternal grandfather grew up in Kansas and Missouri, and he worked for Missouri Pacific Railroad for 49 years. During World War II, he was in Mexico because he was loaned to the Mexican government for supply chain management there.

I didn't know him all that well. We didn't live by my grandparents on my father's side. Sporadically they came up to Chicago, and once in a while we went down to Sedalia, Missouri where they lived.

A couple of things intrigued me about my grandfather. One was the loss of an arm. My grandfather was walking by a railroad track and he fell. This was probably in the 1920s. His left arm went across the track and a train took it out. When you have a grandfather that only has one arm, it gets your attention. Watching somebody navigate life with one arm was interesting. Things we take for granted like cutting meat, getting dressed and buttoning cuffs, and so forth are hard to do with one arm.

He was just an interesting person to be around. He was very competitive. I don't think I beat him in a checkers game when he'd come into town. He died when I was 16. My family drove down to Sedalia for the wake and funeral. At the wake I noticed there was a long line. My grandmother really felt good that that many people had come. As I listened, many of the people who stopped by would share with my grandmother that they cherished a letter they had received from my grandfather.

The funeral was the next day, and again, Grandma was very focused on making sure that everyone got in the church. She was very focused on the diversity of the group. And she felt very good that a number of African Americans attended his funeral. This was not customary, certainly, in Missouri in the 1960s.

After the funeral, we went back to my grandfather's and grandmother's house. I saw four or five gray steel cabinets. Being curious, I went over and looked at the cabinets, and I decided to open them. When I did, I realized that inside were all these carbon copies of letters he had written to people for all

types of accomplishments. This connected the dots for me on why so many people who had come to the wake mentioned to my grandmother the letters they'd received from my grandfather over the years. And it's one of the reasons I tend to write letters to people today.

Besides being the general storekeeper for Missouri Pacific Railroad, my grandfather was the mayor of Sedalia. He ran for mayor because his son, my uncle Herb, had been mayor. My uncle Herb was one of these people who just was good at everything. He had run for mayor, then worked for the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). At 40 years of age he had a massive heart attack and died suddenly. I believe my grandfather ran for mayor because his son had been mayor and he wanted to complete his son's legacy.

When my uncle Herb was mayor of Sedalia, he helped integrate the school system. People felt that by doing this in the 1950s, Sedalia avoided many of the issues other school districts faced in integration in the 1960s. He also was concerned about the deficiencies of the hospital in Sedalia that was for African Americans. They had two hospitals, one for white folks and a separate one for people of color. Thus, he merged the hospitals, which at the time was another controversial decision on his part. He wanted the same level of care for everyone.

My grandmother was a scrapbooker. I have many of her scrapbooks now. She kept all these Sedalia Democrat newspaper articles about my grandfather, every time he cut a ribbon and so forth. As I was going through all this history, one of the articles caught my eye. It said, "Mayor Studer Resigns." Then I picked up the next one, and it said, "Mayor Studer is Back." I did some research, and I found out what happened. My grandfather had wanted to give the sanitation workers a pay raise. Now, at the time, almost 100 percent of all sanitation workers in Sedalia were African American. The city council at the time said that there was no money to give a pay raise.

So, my grandfather said, "Well, let's charge for garbage pickup, and then we'll take that money and provide it to help us raise the salary." Now, you can imagine what happens in a city that hasn't charged for garbage pickup and now says "you're going to pay for it." There was quite an uproar, and the city council basically said, "No. We're not going to charge for garbage."

My grandfather felt so strongly that this was the only way to get the pay raise for the sanitation workers that he quit. I guess some city people didn't like the fact that he had quit. They wanted him back. And he said, "Well, if you pass the fee for garbage collection, I'll come back." So, they passed a fee for garbage collection and he came back.

What I learned from this is that my grandfather was willing to risk his whole job because he felt people should get more money for their hard work. He took on a city council. This made a huge impression on me.

We learn from our elders and we also learn from those who are younger. My grandfather learned from his son, Herb. And don't we all learn lessons on a regular basis from people around us?

This Father's Day, take time to reflect on who you are. Who have you learned from? Who learns from you and what are they learning? We all have teachers. We all are teachers. We owe it to those around us, and those who come after us, to teach lessons that are worth learning and passing on.

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