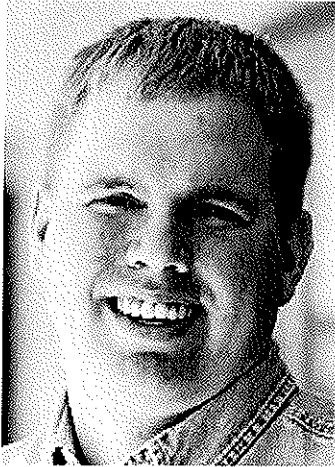


HIS VIEW: A decade later, he's still a great man

By Henry D. Johnston

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Johnston

If there was one person in my life that kept me sane growing up in the small town of St. Maries, Idaho, it was my grandfather, Rudy Klein. Known to me as "Papa Rudy," he had a great sense of humor and years of wisdom to share. I've inherited many of his qualities including the ability to interact with anyone at anytime just as if we're old friends.

Every one of us grandkids had the opportunity to participate in an event called a "Papa Day." The agenda on such a day usually included being picked up in the morning and starting a project in his wood shop, all the while listening to Rush Limbaugh on the radio. Around noon we'd break for lunch at the local diner where he would generally have the special of the day or, if he was feeling adventurous, a tostada - a word he could never pronounce correctly. We'd then go back to the shop, finish the project and head back home.

When my parents remodeled our house in 1997, Papa, a retired carpenter by trade, spearheaded the project. Part of the new design was some tile work on the backsplash in the kitchen and front counters. I watched him intently as he trawled out the mud, laid the tile and then tended to the grout. When he was done he told me I was an expert at tile laying now.

When I asked him why, he replied "Because you seen a guy do it once."

As I got older, Papa continued to be a driving force in my life. Not once would he put down any of my ideas, however crazy they might have been. Whether it was my idea to

become a pet casket distributor at age 11 to the hot dog stand I built at 15, Papa Rudy was right there with me.

Papa went home to be with his Lord Jesus on July 5, 2001, after a long battle with emphysema. He was surrounded by his family that he loved so much with my Grandma Eva and Uncle Rudy Jr. by his bedside the night he died. I later found out that, on the day of his funeral, as the hearse passed through the only four-way stop in St. Maries the last car was leaving the church some four miles back.

That singular event, to me at least, is a truly amazing testament to the impact of a truly amazing man.

It took me a while after he died to quit saying to myself "Oh, I need to tell Papa this" or "Wow, I bet Papa would like to see that." I've had many of those moments in the last couple years as I've changed jobs, bought a house and even fought frozen water pipes.

Recently I've been struggling because realizing that he has been gone 10 years is a big lump to swallow. I'm still wondering where the time has gone and, at times, it feels as if he had just died yesterday.

But when I really think about it, Papa is still with me, both in spirit and through his teachings. I learned life skills and work habits from him that cannot be replaced by anything. I learned how to treat people with respect, how to work hard while still having fun and, most of all, how to put family above all else.

So as I go out into the world I think to myself, "Hey, I'm an expert."

Why?

Because I seen a guy do it once.

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