

Elbert Marshall Dean, Jr.
by Steve J. Dean
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On more than one occasion, my father recalled to me his conversation with a church friend in the old days.

Mr. H— stated, "My children hug me, kiss me, and tell me how much they love me."

Dad responded, "But my children will respect me."

Like prophecy, my father's words proved true: Dad achieved exactly what he desired. Not much for emotion and touching, I didn't kiss and hug him a great deal, but I respect him more than any other human being.

Actually, it was way beyond respect: I revered him. I hark back to the most blissful childhood a boy could have. I grew up easy. Little of the anxiety that comes from being in trouble. I know exactly why. Without hyperbole, I idolized my father. I lived to please him. I regularly mowed our acre and half yard only to hear him say, "Thank you." So I passed easily into the adult world. I think that sometime in my early twenties, I began to realize that Dad did have faults, that he was mortal.

Foremost was the work ethic. I tried to outwork him. To me he was giant, powerful, and manly. My earliest boyhood recollection was of a licking I got over work. When I was four, Dad was tearing down the great barn and must have ordered me out. Underfoot, I just had to be helping. All I clearly remember was the spanking for not being out of danger.

What else would I be but in awe of Dad when I witnessed a truck driver attempting to drag the first of two rolls of that heavy, truck tarp duck off the back of his truck. (I'm guessing each weighed 125 pounds.) Displaying his standard impatience with slow progress, Dad said to the grunting driver, "Here. Just hold the door." Pulling one roll over each shoulder he strode through the door and flipped them both on the floor at once."

A real-life MacGyver, Dad cleverly solved everyday problems. My favorite. Over the years, generally in lots of 300, Dad custom produced thousands of delivery paper holders for attachment in UPS trucks. Each holder required two snaps. Dad's viselike hand easily clamped the tool, but unlocking the vise grip efficiently required ingenuity. Having secured a heavy gauge, inverted "U" shaped wire to

his table, by pulling the grip toward himself, he caught the bottom handle and quickly unlocked the tool. Dad epitomized Ayn Rand's maxim: "Wealth is the product of man's capacity to think."

Rugged. Dad gashed his hand cutting brush with a chain saw. Instead of getting the 20 stitches he needed, he bandaged his hand with kerosene and Vaseline. When a friend asked him why he didn't go for stitches, he answered, "Couldn't find a chain saw doctor."

At Mocha Moment, we post a quote of the week and customers guess the missing word. This week's quote board reads, "I make a good living. Why should I charge what the market will bear?" —Elbert M. Dean, September 25, 1929-December 9, 2011 (My father's response when I asked him why he charged only about half market rates at his upholstery shop.)

And it wasn't just work. Excellence always. He was proud that he made the best boat covers: No rain water could stand on his taut boat tarps to rot them. Not a sag that the wind could catch and rip in his tight pickup covers.

And from him I learned that most important of self-controls: "How to treat a woman." I never once heard my father yell at my mother or intimidate her. My last clearly etched memory derives from the evening meal before Thanksgiving just three weeks ago. I'd gone down on Wednesday to help. Too weak to rake his own leaves and clean his own gutters, he still mustered strength to hold the chair for mother before supper. Action heroes notwithstanding, he was a man.

And I learned self-control: Hold your tongue. Watch that look on your face. Be polite. Say please. And thank-you. Speak quietly. Hold the door for your mom and ladies. Look me in the eye. To speak up. To wait till later. Don't slam the drawer or the door. Dad, I could never repay you.

Plus a rigid discipline. Fellow students at college complained about the military like rules. Not me, I was at summer camp after my home. Dad is commander; mom was captain. Which of us boys can forget the morning routine?

6:30 (Not 6:29, or 6:31), Rise and shine.

6:50, Seated in the family room. Personal devotions.

7:10, Breakfast and fix variances found during room inspection.

Mom: "Steve, one of your hangers is turned backwards."

7:30, Family Bible reading and prayer.

7:50, Off to school and work.

And what else could a guy growing up in West Texas in the Great Depression embody if it weren't frugality. Don't waste anything: not food, not even water. His post meal ritual reigns in my memory: wiping with bread the final crumbs and moisture from his plate and eating it all.

But frugality wasn't squandered on miserliness. He had wealth to share with his wife, his sons, his friends, and the poor. And in old age, he spared younger taxpayers. Unlike his peers who form a fearful voting block which prevents social security reform, he thought his check generous. He was proud that he could not only live off his check, but that from that check he and mom could give to the church, support missionaries, and save the hundreds left over.

Yet Dad detested the government taking his tax money to transfer it to the lazy. Dad wanted to help the poor himself. From time to time, Dad told of beggars who entered his upholstery shop. "No, you can't have any money. But you walk across the street to Lawton's Dairy Island, and eat all you want in the store. I'll walk over later and pay for it." Then he'd place the call, "Mrs. Wenk, let that man eat whatever he wants, but only in the store. I'll be over and pay."

Mrs. Ludwig, a single church mom, and her four children were poor. Old Danny Williams picked up dinged and dented and broken cans and packages from grocery stores and sold them cheap. Weekly, Danny stopped by Al's Auto Upholstery, and Dad bought plenty for us and for Jeannie to ensure that her kids never went hungry.

Honesty. To a customer who wanted Dad to be an accomplice in cheating the insurance company: "Get out of my shop. You heard me. Get out."

Independence. Honest to the dollar on taxes, Dad displayed a fierce American independence from Big Brother. To the tax man who came to Al's Auto Upholstery. "You left your tax form line blank for the amount you have in your shop account." "I know it." "Well, how much?" "None of your business." "Well, what should I write on the line?" "None of your business."

And cleverness. To a doctor who came in Saturday morning and agitated Dad to work past noon on his boat cushions for use that afternoon on the lake. "I tell you what to do. Go home. Tape two aspirin on the cushion. Come back Monday morning, and I'll fix it."

And defense of widows. Seared into my senses is the rugged reaction on my father's fierce face one early winter evening. My

recently widowed Grandma Hey sat down for supper. She casually remarked that she'd bought snow tires at Bun Austin, the Chevy dealer. Dad asked, "How much?" Gram answered, "\$500." (A whopping sum in 1967.) Clattering his fork to his plate, Dad marched out the door. And this time it slammed. Not long after, Dad returned, sat down, resumed eating, and forthrightly announced, "The price just went down."

I imbibed faith from my father. Believing in a God he could not see, he navigated life to please Him. And with that faith, come hope and courage that conquer adversity. Friends may fail. Troubles will come. But live deliberately and triumph because God will be with you, and you will be with God.

Finally, from *Les Miserables*, my favorite lines in all literature.

From heaven Fantine beckons the dying saint,

"Come with me where chains will never bind you,

All your grief, your grief at last behind you."

From his death bed Valjean looks up to the Father,

"Forgive me all my trespasses and take me to your glory."

Then turning to his children, Valjean leaves them this legacy,

"Remember the truth that once was spoken,

'To love another person is to see the face of God'."

Dad, I hope to meet you in a not-so-distant land with a Savior we both embrace. So Godspeed. I love you, Dad, and I still want you to be proud of me.