Arts and Humanities Commission

2016 Writing Contest

First Place

Division – Adult

Category – Short Works

"Dad"

by Alan Winn

Dad

I talked to my sister the other night on the phone. It was a short conversation, and we talked mostly about my dad.

This past January, my dad turned 90 years old. Mom has already moved on to that glorious next realm, so my sister and her husband live with Dad to help take care of him. They take great care of him, too, and my dad is very appreciative. Since they're in California and I'm here in Texas, phone calls keep up connected.

Dad is starting to forget things – many things, actually. When we talk on the phone, we have a similar conversation each time: he asks me where I'm living, and I tell him we're in Texas; I tell him about the family, and he talks about Mom; I tell him about work, trying my best to make it sound interesting, and he tells me about breaking up boxes at the food pantry where he volunteers; I bring up the weather, and he talks about World War II and the impact that it had on his life...and so it goes. Each phone call is nearly the same now. It's easy, too, because I already know all the questions that will be asked and all the answers to provide ahead of time.

My sister told me of a conversation she had with my dad the other day that went something like this:

> "Dad, here's a birthday card for you to sign. You can sign it as 'Grampa'" she said.
>
> "I've forgotten how to make a G," my dad said.
>
> "That's ok. You can sign it as 'Dad'," my sister replied.
>
> "I can't. I've forgotten how to make a 'D,' too."

As I thought about this, I realized that there are probably many other things that I'm sure my dad has forgotten along the way. Here are just a few of those things.

Dad, you probably don't remember rocking me in that old vinyl rocking chair with the wooden rivets on the arm rests. I couldn't have been more than 3 or 4 years old. You'd sing songs, and I'd listen carefully, a little with my ears but mostly with my heart. "Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam" and "Give, Said the Little Stream" seemed to be favorites. Then you'd squeeze in "I've Been Working on the Railroad." And you always seemed to sing "Jesus Once Was a Little Child" a little bit softer than all the other songs.

Dad, you probably don't remember taking all of us boys to play miniature golf one Saturday afternoon. I think that was out in Inglewood, wasn't it, a little ways past Randys' Donuts? There was that big, huge statue out in front of

the man holding the golf club across his outstretched arms. Yes, that afternoon was magical, but you probably don't remember it.

Dad, you probably don't remember making omelettes on Saturday mornings or the way that you'd tap your ring on the steering wheel while you whistled to the radio.

Dad, you probably don't remember the time that you found an old tattered American flag, about the size of a sheet of paper, on the ground outside. I'm not sure where that flag came from, but I remember that it was tattered and worn. You probably don't remember following protocol by lighting a small fire on the back patio by the garage and respectfully destroying that old flag one morning before I went to grade school. And you probably didn't see me watching you from the back door, did you? And you don't know how much I learned about patriotism that morning, do you?

Dad, you probably don't remember waking me up for high school each morning. I'm not sure how many school days there were in four years -- more than 700 maybe? And do you remember, like I do, that you never once complained about it?

Dad, you probably don't remember that night that I asked you for help with my Calculus homework when I was a senior in high school. It was late that night, and I covered my face so you wouldn't see me fighting off sleep. As an aeronautical engineer, this stuff was child's play for you. You probably don't remember how patient you were that night while trying to help me grasp all those mysterious concepts and inexplicable theorems. No, I didn't learn anything new about Calculus that night, but I did learn a lot more about you and about the kind of dad that I wanted to become myself someday.

And Dad, you probably don't remember the hundreds -- no, thousands -- of times that you put Mom first, opened the door for her, gave her hugs and kisses, wrote her notes, called her on the phone each afternoon before coming home from work, thanked her for the meals she'd make and the shirts she'd iron, passed the sacrament to her first in church, etc. The list is long, but no matter because chances are, you probably don't remember how you taught us boys how to respect women simply by your example.

I know someday I'll give you a call on the phone, and you'll say, "Who is this?" and "Do I know you?" Yes, it will hurt, immensely even, but I won't take it personally. You will have forgotten, but I will have remembered.

I love you, Dad.