

Pop Culture

by Karen Sponaugle

Having in-laws can sometimes be a double-edged sword. I seem to have lucked out marrying a man with loving, caring parents. My “Pop” as I called him reminds me in a lot of ways of my own father with his impish sense of humor and his way with electronics. Both men hated to throw anything out, and I do mean anything, with the hope that someday an odd found item could come to the rescue of someone that could use it! Pop was a giver, and he would help anyone he thought needed it. I remember when Harvey and I took my mom to Lincoln County to meet his parents for the first time. Their mobile home has a front porch with cinder blocks neatly stacked for steps; not glamorous by any means, but very functional. My mom was using a walker and having trouble maneuvering steps. After we left, Pop went to Lowe’s, got some treads and a couple of risers to install some steps before the next visit, so my mom would be more at ease when she got there.

I remember the first time I met Pop, smiling ear to ear with a welcoming gleam in his eyes. The gleam was also fringed with a bit of orneriness that I couldn’t help but fall in love with. Pop was a simple country boy who had experienced a typical childhood for a country boy, served his country, married and worked hard all his life to provide for his family. Oh yes, and Pop had one other endearing quality that I absolutely love. He had a way with words. Not that Pop was a prolific writer, or a stellar spokesman, but he possessed what I lovingly called “Dadisms” from time to time that just made him more endearing.

I would define “Dadism” as a word or phrase spoken by Earl Sponaugle that sometimes sounded like what he meant, wasn’t, but you knew what he meant anyway. For example, he was always going to “Scissors” to get things to work on his computer. Now, you may not make the connection easily, but think about it. Scissors are usually found on a desk just like a stapler. Could he mean he’s going to Staples? We all knew this and didn’t miss a beat when he spoke of going there. It was when he started referring to Staples as “Stitchners” that threw us for a loop.

Pop started having some medical problems, which opened the door for myriad new Dadisms, like when the doctors told him he had “suggestive” heart failure. Now you and I know what he meant, and I have often wondered if he didn’t just do it for kicks. He told us about his M I C, oh you know, the high-resolution x-ray thing, or was that the long distance company. I guess I’m still a little fuzzy on that one. I can’t forget the K E G they did on his heart either; he went into detail on that one.

At one point, Pop had to go to Cleveland Veteran’s Hospital to have risky double bypass surgery. Of course Harvey and I went up for the surgery and stayed several days. I have never seen a man with a stronger will or the calmness of conviction that knew when your time was up, it was up. He always used to say, “You’ll be here until the man upstairs pulls that last hair on your head.” He had no fear of dying or where he was going after that. We would pray with him, and I do believe he had a strong faith just by the way he used to reassure all of us that he’d be fine.

I miss my talks with Pop. Every time we would go to visit, he always spent time talking to me, telling me about his time in the Air Force, which he was very proud of, or about working on his latest computer problem. I loved the stories about his family, growing up, and places he had seen while in the military. He talked about being in Alaska with the cold and having snow blindness. As he talked, I could imagine the places he spoke of and feel the pride in his voice after having served his country in an honorable way. I miss hearing the “Howdy, Howdy” greeting between Harvey and his dad when they spoke on the phone. I was always the “Girl” and Harvey was the “Boy” when it came to calling and asking for either of us. He was all business on the phone, and we all knew when he was through talking when we would hear him say, “I love you, and tell the girl (or boy, whichever the case may be), I love her too.” This was followed by a quick dial tone, and we just knew the conversation was finished. Harvey, being the oldest son, had a unique relationship with his dad. They both had been truck drivers at some point in their lives. I can remember Pop telling me about the times when he had gone with Harvey and the adventures they had, the sights they saw, and best of all the loving tone of his voice when

he spoke of those times spent with his son. I heard the unspoken love and pride in his voice that his son had followed in his footsteps.

Pop died last October, and it's hard to visit my mother-in-law knowing that he is gone. I remember the last really good talk we had about his having nightmares. He told me he hated going to sleep because the dreams were really bad. Pop was diabetic, as am I, and I wondered if maybe he was having a blood glucose drop in the middle of the night. We talked about what he was eating for a bedtime snack and it really was not enough to sustain him until morning. I suggested he try half a peanut butter sandwich and a little skim milk. Harvey spoke to his dad the next day and my ears should have been burning from all the accolades Pop had for me when he went into detail about my knowing what I was talking about, and that I knew more than those doctors. It made me feel good that I could help this precious man, a man who helped instill in my husband the values and beliefs he lives by now.



I know that Pop is okay, and he keeps an eye on Harvey and me. I miss that untrimmed beard of his and the sparkle in his eyes when we visited, but I find comfort in the fact that he is no longer in pain and can run, skip and jump with the rest of our loved ones who have gone on before us. I know in my heart that the apple didn't fall far from the tree. Earl Jo lives on in Harvey with his humor, mannerisms, and love. In fact, every now and then, I catch a glimpse of that same sparkle in Harvey's eyes.