

let's make A MEMORY

Celebrating the Young and the Young at Heart

I REMEMBER WHEN

Homecoming Artists Look Back on Favorite Childhood Memories

Allison Speer recounts memories of the granddaddy who held her heart



I cannot reminisce about my childhood without spending most of my time honoring my grandfather. He was the spiritual patriarch of my family and the sweetheart of my life. Granddad's nickname was "Doc." Though not a doctor, he certainly had healing in his touch, knowing just what to say to the hurting, and how to show the great love that could disarm any tension.

Granddaddy Doc was a master farmer. He knew how to treat the land like a valentine, sweet and tender, making sure he did not waste its bounty. He took care of cows, gardens, dogs and kids like a shepherd trained to corral animals into a safe pen. He could cook melt-in-your-mouth water cornbread that still eludes my abilities.

Doc loved Jesus and was a great churchman. As a deacon, he worked hard to visit and give to the congregation guidance that drove us all full bore toward godly character.

He had a Ford tractor, white with a red seat and lettering. My younger brother decided one day that the whole tractor needed to be red. He painted it while Doc was gone. I remember the look on Granddaddy's face. He smiled a toothy smile, let out a hog-calling whoop and said, "A new red tractor! I'll get my plowing done in half the time with Bessie now." My brother beamed with pride and the knowledge that he was loved unconditionally.

Granddad took me to my first gospel concert. I had learned of a coming concert by the Imperials and at 14, I was not allowed to date, so Granddad agreed to escort me. We listened to the 100-decibel sounds and stories backed with guitars, keys, drums and horns. Doc thought it was too loud. He never realized the impact that

night would have on the rest of my life. That is the night I was called by God to share the gospel with music.

One of my mother's four jobs was cleaning our church. We were there when we learned the fire department had been called to our house. When we arrived home it was engulfed in flames. I can still see my granddaddy being wrestled to the ground by firefighters as he tried to get into the burning home, screaming my name and my brother's. He thought we were inside. Never have I known an embrace like his when he realized we were safe.

We moved in with Grandmother and Granddad after the fire. Life progressed with times of need and seasons of plenty.

Our lives became desperate when Granddad's doctor spoke the word cancer. Though it wracked his body, it never shook his spirit. He prayed and leaned on God and my brother a little harder.

The physical weakness could not diminish his desire to farm. One day he mounted his red tractor and began to plow the tobacco field. My mother called us to the front door and said, "Kids, take a good look at your granddaddy. This will be the last time you see him like that." There he was, billed cap and denim overalls, plodding slowly, back and forth while the soil turned over, uprooting the weeds. It was the last time he rode a tractor. Granddaddy died two months later. Until that time I had not known a person could feel such physical pain from the grief of the heart. A giant had passed away.

I have met and been affected by so many great people in my life, but none have I loved like I loved my grandfather. I have sent my heart on ahead to heaven with him. 