

Grandpa Bill

09-09-2015 by Harry Zirkelbach

Grandpa, Mom's Dad, was an vague unknown, to me and my siblings in the 1950-60 years. At the time of which this pertain, he was the only living grandparent Barbara and I had.

He had walked out of his family when Mom was a little girl. There was an occasional mention of him at family special gatherings. From those bits and pieces of his life he was defined, for I never met nor he ever speak to me. I constructed a man, for most friends had Grandpa's they loved, were loved by. This I thought I knew about Bill He was stubborn, ego-centric, left his wife, and children to fend for themselves, self taught, loved things that moved, like trains. And before and after his daughter's marriage tok me and through the first children, he ignored her family.

By the time the children became teenager,s I had seen him a few times. He was never pleasant to anyone that I could see, not even wife his wife while she was still alive .With Mom, he was curt, rude, ever demanding, never giving. But, he did dominate; for he commanded things be done. His attitude, to say "please" was a sin suggesting weakness.

I would see little change in the years following his wife's death. Yes, he didn't attend her funeral.

Great change began with his asking his daughter, (his other three children and their families all lived in other states; he never contacted with them), telling her to prepare a 50th Anniversary Party for his wedding, which he had formally ended thirty years earlier, and of course now he was without wife. A list of invitees was provided this Mom. The date set, he was to celebrate in style in daughters home.

Oddly, the list he provided was made of individuals who were Grandma friends, individual grandpa knew slightly, but recognized they would come just to see what had become of him. Denver provided a bright spring day for the party, and just like Grandpa expected, all invited attended, dressed for celebration. Mom even arranged to have a photographer record the event for her dad. When we spoke of the day later, Mom casually mentioned Grandpa never thanked her.

Afterward a further mellowing. He called his daughter more, asking this and that, less demanding.

This tale. As a child Grandpa Bill dreamed of being a Railroad Engineer, directing those monsters on their rails of the world. He had several sets of Engineer Clothing, and of course, caps. When still married, young, prosperous, a Sunday excursion might take the whole family in his car to be as a siding at some Eastern Plains RR crossing at 2:22 PM, to see the scheduled freight pass. Grandpa would have gone to the Denver yard during the week found the Engineer for that scheduled trip, told him what he intended. Sure enough, right on time the freight would appear, whistle blowing a long hello from that Engineer. They would exchange generous waves of their caps, dual greetings.

As legend, in my mind, still a marvel.

Grandpa collected things. Somehow he had bought a cabin on US 285 a mile this side of the Elk Creek Fire Department. Small acreage, hilly, facing southwest. It was not a cave. But earth had been moved from the hill, making a even floor, two walls then bricked, a roof and door added. Primitive, junky inside, but the view from the front door, and patio, wonderful.

He'd have us up a summer week-end day, Mom provide lunch, and grandpa would tell stories, never about family. And the real reason, he loved to gamble. He would only play with his grandchildren, ask that we provide them pennies for his poker game. That begin each days play.

Grandpa would bring out a brown leather round cup spread the pennies he had, divide them evenly with the players. There was no cheating. You played until you lost all. Or until Grandpa announced, games over. Then he asks for return of all coins, put them back in the cup for next time. You never won, but the child did lose those coins contributed. He would not listen to any complaint of unfair.

So eventually we quit complaining, lost interest in the competition.

He teaching message, constantly, life is unfair.

Even today, thirty years later, Grandpa Foley sticks in my memory, a giant grouch. Others of my family remain less kind of his memory.