

## Beyond Price

by Nancy Martz

When I think about things I could never throw away, I wince because I've probably lost them. These days I keep only what still breathes, like my dogs and cat. Very few keepsakes could compare to the only letter my Dad ever wrote--one to me after I left home for my freshman year at the university. I lost the letter, and he never wrote another.

Unfortunately, I can't remember what his letter said. Maybe it said, "Be careful with my money. Don't spend it on clothes." Maybe he wrote, "Don't flunk out and embarrass the whole family." But I don't think so. I think he was remembering me at 4 years old when he called me Daddy's Little Helper. We slopped the pigs, I with my small pail alongside him with his 5 gallon bucket. Or my 7 year old face full of astonishment when he and I were walking through the corn field and he sneaked up on and caught a huge jack rabbit by the back feet. Or when he surprised me at age 10 with a tiny black puppy after my pleas had been turned down repeatedly because I had asthma. He had such joy in his face showing me how the puppy crossed its feet when he held it on its back in his beautiful, weathered farmer's hands. He was beaming and had said, "Look, Nancy, look at his feet! Isn't this the puppy for you?" Oh I remember, my wonderful Dad. I see your kind face and bright blue eyes shining with sheer joy in giving me that puppy I named "Skippy" and adored with all my heart.

I always loved riding into town with him in his red ford pickup. He waved at everyone, neighbor or stranger, and told me to do the same. When I could drive, he told me to roll gently through country stop signs at night with the doors locked in case someone was hiding in the ditch. Many summer nights he and I sat in the 4-person swing his father built and looked at the stars, talking about whatever was on my mind.

There were times growing up when he would tease me mercilessly, and I would become hotly agitated and say whatever creatively mean things I could think up back at him. He wrote all of them down in a notebook and read them aloud to his and mother's friends who would come over to play cards and have drinks. I would be in my room upstairs, but I could hear him putting on my voice and laughter ringing out from the kitchen table as he read from the notebook. He would read, "Daddy said \_\_\_\_\_" "Nancy retorted \_\_\_\_\_."

Later in life when he died unexpectedly in a farm accident, I looked for that notebook, but it was gone, and I can't recall any of it.

So these days, I'm forgetful and without proof because I've lost things. I do have wonderful feelings of joy, however, that come from loving Dad.