

CHAPTER 1: MY FAMILY

Dad Memories – Part 1

Proverbs 23:24

*The father of a righteous child has great joy;
a man who fathers a wise son rejoices in him.*

My dad grew up in a large family. I think they had five boys and three girls. His dad was at one time a motorcycle cop during the roaring twenties. When I knew “Pipi” (French for grandpa), he was a chain smoking, lower middle class hunting, fishing, and trapping farmer. My memories of him were of our rare visits to dad’s parents. Usually they were gathered around the kitchen table smoking, playing cards, and drinking beer. I can clearly see my Pipi leaning on the potbelly stove smoking his cigarettes while other family members played cards. All of these activities were sinful vices so we were scurried off to the living room to sit quietly as the old folks visited.

Dad in the Army

Dad was in the army in WWII as a corporal working alongside a pharmacist, who often told my dad he would have made an excellent chemist or pharmacist. Dad worked in a psych ward for men who had post traumatic stress disorder, or who went berserk when they got that inevitable “dear John” letter. Most notable to me was the story Dad told of a huge man who went ballistic on the medics in an uncontrollable rage. Dad took him out with one punch to the jaw that left the man unconscious. Dad was short, but tough.

Dad, the Hunter

My first memory of my dad was that he had a shotgun and would go hunting pheasants out in the back of our property on Keagan Road. I remember that mostly because my brother Dave got to go hunting one day with my dad, which made me mad because I wanted to go. My mom had insisted on him taking my older brother though I don’t think dad was too keen on the idea. They weren’t gone very long before they were back. Probably because Dave was a talker and that would have driven my dad to distraction. Soon after that my mom insisted on not having a shotgun in the house with little boys around.

The Wild Game Dinners

Regardless of dad giving up hunting I have memories of his family providing us with occasional treats of small game. I remember dad bringing home a brace of wild ducks or geese they bagged on a hunt. Dad would pluck the feathers and mom cleaned and prepared them for a meal. She did not enjoy that, especially since we had to be careful not to bite into the buckshot still in the birds. Then

there were the occasional fish we were given by my uncles. We kids hated fish. It made no sense to eat something that you had to pick bones out of your mouth to eat.

Muskrat and Turtle

One day dad brought home muskrat from his family's trappings. I am sure they meant well but muskrat tastes like mud. I think that only happened once and my mom said no more. Someone in dad's family caught a turtle so we were to eat turtle. My brother Dave had a fit about it and stated that he would never eat turtle. My mom then secretly made turtle soup, or perhaps it was a stew, and served it to us without David knowing what it was. He asked for second helpings saying how good it was. Then mom asked if he knew what he was eating. He said no, but it sure was good. She then revealed that it was turtle. I don't think Dave was hungry for seconds after that.

Killing Rabbits

Dad decided to raise rabbits. We had a crawl space under our house that served as an ideal pen for the rabbits. We would occasionally get to coax one out and play with it. Then came the day that dad said the rabbits were big and needed to be killed and eaten. Oh, we kids had fits. Why would you kill our rabbits and eat them? But dad insisted that this was why we raised the rabbits. He then took them up to the unfinished attic and proceeded to knock them unconscious with a big club. I remember. I saw him do it. We all cried and ran downstairs to tell mom what a horrible dad we had. None of us wanted to eat rabbit stew.

Killing Chickens

Later in our childhood dad brought home a couple of live chickens that we were going to kill and eat. I remember dad saying, "You all like to eat chicken. Where do you think that meat comes from?" We had a small fenced in yard and dad let the chickens run around in the yard until he caught one to wring its neck and dip it in boiling water to prepare it for plucking. We thought that was so cruel. Dad said, "Well I can cut off the head if you think wringing their necks is cruel." He had left one chicken for last. He caught it and this time he didn't tie its feet. He laid it on a stump and chopped off its head. To our amazement the chicken jumped up and ran around the yard without a head as blood squirted out everywhere. We screamed, "Daddy, he's still alive!" Dad said, "No, he's dead, he just doesn't know it yet." Sure enough, the chicken soon flopped over and died. Later in life, that became a good illustration of Jesus' victory over Satan through the cross. Satan's power is destroyed and his doom is sure. His head is cut off but he doesn't know his doom is sure.

Liver and Onions

By far the worst meal we had to endure as children was the loathsome liver. Liver didn't often make it to our table, but maybe a couple of times a year we had to endure it. It was a disgusting mass of bloody slime before mom cooked it, and it wasn't much better after she cooked it. Mom would fry the thing till it was dry as a bone and shriveled up. Maybe she wanted to be sure it was dead and bloodless. We gagged it down with threats that we were not allowed to leave the table until all on our plates was gone. We were thankful to be able to drown it in piles of catsup. (When we had a dog we would secretly feed her under the table.) The worst of our liver-detesting world was when another poor and equally large family in the church invited us to have Sunday dinner at their house. They lived in a converted chicken coop, of all places. Mom warned us to be on our best behavior and not to mention their house being a chicken coop. To our horror they were serving liver for dinner, and NO CATSUP! Mom threatened us all with the belt if we so much as made an ugly face during the meal. We got through it and had a wonderful time with our friends, but we will never forget that liver meal.

Dad's Temper

My dad had a temper. I inherited my dad's temper. I tell these stories not to blame or shame him but to illustrate where I got my temper. My grandfather probably had a bad temper too, and I know my great grandfather had an evil personality and a bad temper. Later in life my dad told the story of going to his maternal grandfather's funeral and hearing the priest put him in the deepest hell saying, "This was the most evil man I have ever known." Dad said that made him furious and influenced him not to want to return to church.

As I previously stated my dad was saved when I was young. I'm glad dad got saved. Perhaps that was the only thing that kept him from walking off on his family. Mom, for all her good traits, was a nag. Like too many women she didn't have enough sense to let a matter go. She would harp on it non-stop until dad would blow up. I think he learned that blowing up was the only thing that would stop her. From my earliest age I remember dad's temper being his defining feature. Dad would sometimes throw violent fits of rage. I think it was to keep mom in tow. I thank God that to my knowledge my dad never hit my mom or was physically abusive in any way. Yet, dad had that temper.

My dad had his ups and downs spiritually. There were periods when he hungered after God. He became our Sunday School Superintendent and an elder in the church. I remember he even preached when our pastor was absent. I remember the sermon title, "Are you a Thermostat or a Thermometer Christian?"

The tenderest moment in my dad's life was during one of those spiritually alive periods. He and the pastor had been talking about going to visit my grandfather

who was not a believer. Dad wanted to lead his dad to Christ but didn't know how, so the pastor agreed to go with my dad to talk to him about Jesus. They made the appointment but something came up that week and they had to postpone the visit until the following week. Early that following week my grandfather had a massive heart attack and died. I remember it vividly. As we drove to visit my grandmother Dad was so overcome with grief that he could not see to drive. He had to pull to the side of the road and wept bitterly. I can still see him beating on the steering wheel and saying, "Oh, why, oh, why didn't we keep that visit. My dad is in hell today because I failed to lead him to Christ."