

FATHERS AND SONS
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On September 29, 1929, on the banks of the Buffalo River in Lobelville, Tn., John Wilson DePriest and Pearl Hunt DePriest were blessed with their first child, a baby boy. They named him after John's father, Robert, a local farmer and landowner, and Pearl's father, Monroe Hunt, a county judge and State Legislator. They didn't have much then, but nobody down in DePriest Bend had much back in those days. Not long after, with the whole country in an economic tailspin, most folks were struggling, fearful of not being able to find their next meal. It didn't affect folks in Perry County too much. They just kept on putting out gardens, wearing homespun clothes, milking the cows, sharing news at the Lobelville store on Saturday, going to church meetings on Sunday, and generally ignoring the moonshiners who ran a good portion of the county's economy.

In 1941, John moved his young family to Spragin's Farm near Jackson, TN. Here he and Robert, then 12, picked peaches for \$12.00 for a 60-hour week. The boy only made \$7.50 a week, but at the time, that bought 2 weeks' worth of groceries for the family. Before long, John moved to a job at the Milan Arsenal building bombs and shells for the Army. Peace-loving John struggled with making weapons and eventually moved to Jackson and began making barrels for a whiskey company. A teetotaler, John didn't want to be part of the liquor business either, so he took a job at a local lumber yard. Putting his bicycle to good use, young Robert began his first real job delivering prescriptions for a drugstore, continuing to work this job through high school. In 1950, while employed at J. C. Penney, he married a beautiful, blue-eyed blonde from Bemis, Joyce Hilliard. Soon, he entered the military and worked as a medical tech in the new field called x-ray photography. Just before his discharge in 1953, while stationed at Fort Rucker, Alabama, he and Joyce were blessed with a baby boy. They named him after his dad and added Junior. If you haven't guessed by now, that's me.

I have seen my father stay in love with the same gal forever and raise kids without yelling. As much as I hate to admit it, those spankings probably did hurt him worse than they hurt me. I have seen him stand by his pastor when others wouldn't, sometimes when he wasn't sure who was right, but because it was the right thing to do. I have seen him spend time at the church, giving an hour, or a day, because he was short on sales, or business was down, and I have seen the sales or business just "magically" pick up again. I have seen him walk away when people lied about him because there was nothing to gain by starting a fight. I have seen him at his strongest when he returned from a business trip to find that his six-year-old baby girl had been killed in an auto accident, and there was nobody to be strong but him. I have watched him weep at the funeral of a friend, and I have watched him get a charley horse in his smile muscles when his grandkids were born.

I am blessed to have known my grandfather for many years, and to have enjoyed my dad's company all my life. There are some things I have learned from these men that can only be learned from a father, or sometimes, a dad. I have learned that integrity is worth more than money; that a man's good word will let him sleep at night in a lumpy bed; but that he seldom sleeps well in the best bed if his word is worthless. I have learned it's a great thing to have the respect of one's peers, but it's much greater to have the respect of those who live with you – your wife and kids. I learned that the greatest thing of all is to respect yourself, and to know you have pleased God. I have learned that the best revenge is living well, unaffected by those who wish you ill, and that nobody wins a fight, really.

I have learned that things are seldom as good as they seem, and almost always never as bad as they seem. I have learned we should always consider the other fellow first. We may not always put him first, but it's still wise and good to think about it. I've learned that being strong sometimes means taking a stand that is unpopular; that not all arguments are arguable; and that there are some things you do "just because". I have learned that the world is bigger than my back yard, but not necessarily better. I have learned that the longer a decision will affect your life, the longer you should take to make that decision. I have learned that giving it your best is the only acceptable performance level. I have learned that God never fails, that friends are a good investment, and that my country is absolutely worth the trouble.

He still is a giant in my eyes, even though I'm 4 inches taller. He still loves my mom, he still prays for his kids, and theirs, and he still believes the right things are the right things. I wouldn't trade him for a dozen of the best, though he might have traded me a time or two. I hope I can give my kids a few of these life lessons that matter.

Some things you can't get from just anyone – except a dad.