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My grandfather's once-in-a-lifetime faith

Kate Childs Graham | Jun. 17, 2010

My grandfather was born and raised in the mining hills of Alabama. He stopped formal schooling at the age of 12 and went to work in construction. That work took him around the country, and he eventually landed in the not-so-booming metropolis of Merrillville, Indiana, where he met my grandmother. They had three kids, and he had a long career as a plumber.

He was pretty strict with his children, though he loved them very much. And with his grandkids, he was nothing but love and hugs. I can hear him saying, ?Hug my neck,? in that slow, Southern drawl to this day.

My grandpa was a devout Southern Baptist. He attended church twice a week. He always had two Bibles, one next to his bed and one next to his chair in the living room. They were well worn from hours of reading. Most importantly, he lived his faith and challenged others to do the same.

My grandpa and I were very close. When I was little, he took me to ?McDonalds? every Saturday. I ordered a plain hamburger. He ordered a big breakfast. One Saturday, my godmother was taking me to meet my mom and dad, and so I couldn?t go to McDonalds. As the story goes, I cried and cried. My grandpa retold that story for a good 20 years, with a twinkle in his eye every time.

Of course, our relationship became more profound as I grew older. He taught me how to fish. He beamed at my first Communion, though he didn?t fully understand Catholicism. We talked about life and faith and love. And when my grandmother died, he reminded me to cherish what I have each and every day.

One Thanksgiving when I was home from college, my father made an ignorant remark about gay men. Before I knew it, I blurted out that I was gay. There was silence around the table.

The next day, my grandpa invited me to breakfast at a local diner ? a big step up from McDonalds. At the time, I didn?t realize the significance of this gesture. At breakfast, he said this:

?Katie, I may not understand everything in this world, but I know God does. I know God wants us to live our lives and be happy, because we are all His children. It doesn?t matter how you choose to live your life, as long as you are doing God?s will.?

He never mentioned my being gay, but I knew he was telling me that he loved and accepted me. His faith was big enough that he was willing to leave the judgment to God, and take me as I am. And when he met my partner, he embraced her as one of his own.

My grandpa was a man of great integrity. He was kind and honest. He was funny. He cared deeply for his friends and family. Above all, he was a child of God and a follower of Jesus. He knew it, and so did everyone around him.

Three years ago this month, my grandfather and I prayed the ?Our Father? together as he laid in hospice -- a

common prayer amid a world of differences. My prayer today is that I can learn to live my faith as he did.

If you?d like to acknowledge the great faith and love of your father or grandfather, please do so in the comment section below.

[Kate Childs Graham writes for **ReligionDispatches.org** [1] and **YoungAdultCatholics-Blog.com** [2]. She also serves on the Women?s Ordination Conference board of directors and the Call to Action Next Generation Leadership Team.]

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