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Glen and Crystal Baker, short stories about my parents, LeGrand Baker

My parents each wrote their autobiography, so there is no reason for me to tell their stories on this disk, however, for the record, I want to relate some short stories that typifies each of them.

I was only 4 years old (I know that because I checked the date with Ida Horrocks), but I recall this quite vividly -- I suspect because it was the first time in my young life I had experienced something really traumatic, or exciting, or both. We lived on a farm near Salem, and our nearest neighbors to the west, Chris and Ida Horrocks, were about half a mile away. One day we saw smoke and fire coming from their place. Daddy put me in our Model T Ford and drove there as fast as he could. The road was not really a road – just wagon tracks that ran along the canal at the bottom of our field, then through the gate and at the bottom of someone else’s field. When we arrived, we saw that Chris’ barn was almost burned. I remember the smell of the animals that had been in the barn and were burned in the fire. The town’s fire department came, but they couldn’t get the fire truck to pump enough water out of the canal to do much good. The mayor, Mel Hanks, was there and a good many other people from town also. I remember holding on to my dad’s hand while we waited for Mel and Chris to get through talking. Mel said, “Chris, if there is anything I can do to help you, you just let me know.” I remember my dad squeezing my hand, so I suspect it hurt a little (and I now think he probably clinched both fists.) He knelt down and looked me in the face and said, “Don’t you ever say that in your whole lifetime. If you are going to help someone, just do it, don’t make him feel like he has to ask.” After Chris and my dad were alone, Daddy said, “Chris, I’m going to bring you a pig in the morning.”

I was concerned about that. We were still in the Great Depression. I didn’t know about the Depression, but I did know we were poor and money was really hard to come by. On the way home I remember asking my dad, “Daddy, do we really have an extra pig.” He replied (I am sure this is an exact quote), “LeGrand, there times when you always have an extra pig.”

I was still a bit concerned about Mama. She almost always said we didn’t have enough money to buy me candy when we went shopping, and I wasn’t at all sure she would know we had an extra pig. When Daddy told her what had happened she said (I am pretty sure this is also an exact quote), “That’s good. Take him the big sow.” I remember I was surprised at her choice, and I now suspect the reason I remember was that is the big sow was probably pregnant and I had probably heard conversation about how they hoped she would have a big litter, or perhaps I had been told this time (as I was others) that I should keep an eye out and tell them as soon as I saw the baby pigs, because sometimes big pigs will lay on a baby pig without knowing it.

When my Dad died, I wanted to tell that story at his funeral, so I called Ida and asked her when her barn burned, so I could figure out how old I was when this all happened. I told her the story and she said, “Mel Hanks never gave us a thing, but your dad didn’t bring us a pig, he brought us a big load of hey instead.” Then she told me that they found the pigs the evening of the fire. Their backs were burned, but someone had let them out of the pen in time to save them. We both surmised that when my dad found out that the pigs were safe, he brought the other thing Chris most needed, a big load of hey.

That story says almost everything there is to say about my dad: “If you are going to help someone, just do it, and don’t make him feel like he has to ask;” and “LeGrand, there times when you always have an extra pig.”

Second story:

This is not so much a story as it is a snippet of conversation, but it needs to be remembered. I once asked my dad if he was sorry he sold the farm. He said he wasn’t, then added that he hadn’t had much choice: “You weren’t interested in being a farmer, and I didn’t expect the other kids would either. We couldn’t afford to stay in Salem and send you all to college, so we moved to Provo so you could live at home and go to school.”

All of my brothers and my sister have graduated from college. Partly because our doing that was one of the most important things in our parents’ lives.

Third story:

This story was told to me by my mother – therefore my first hand knowledge of the voice inflections – but I have also heard the same story several times from her friends.

My Mom had been a worker in the Provo Temple for several years, and eventually was put in charge of a shift of other temple workers. During that time, there was a change in the temple presidency. On one occasion in a meeting of all the temple workers, the new temple president singled her out in front of everyone and said, "Sister Baker, we do not hug patrons in the temple."

She replied, "Ooooh, I do."

Now, those words won't read right unless the "Ooooh" sounds a little bit like a hug – a gentle hug, like the “Ooooh” she would say to me when I was little and came crying because I had stubbed my toe – the kind of “Oooh” that goes with a hug to make someone another feel better. The "I" has a smile with a twinkle and just a little bit of mischief in it. The kind of “I” a child would say if he had hidden something and teasingly said to his mom, “ *I* know where it is.” And the "do" rings with an inviting kind of enthusiasm which suggests the temple president would really be much happier if he hugged more people. The temple president did not reply, and he never mentioned it to her again.

“... but she never stopped hugging her friends – at least she always hugged me whenever I came to the temple,” concluded each one of those friends who later told me the story.

another story:

After we from the farm to Provo, my mom worked in the mental hospital at the end of center street. She started in house cleaning, but was quickly promoted to be an attendant who worked with the patients. The hospital paid her tuition so she could earn her LPN, then promoted her to “head attendant” of her ward. When the outpatient services were established, Mama’s best friend was put in charge of it, and Mama became her assistant until she retired, then Mama became head of the outpatient work of the hospital. After Mama retired, she continued to visit many of the former patients she had helped during her career. That is background for the following:

For about 6 months after my mother died I kept getting anonymous telephone calls. I recall only one of those people who wanted to tell me her name. The messages were all different in detail, but they all had the same ideas: 1) You don’t know me and it doesn’t matter, but I just had to call you so I could tell you how much I miss your mother. 2) She saved my life – many actually used those words – then they would explain that they had believed their lives were over when they were admitted to the mental hospital, and when they were released from the hospital, they were afraid of what they would face when they came out. Those who had known her earlier said that Mama’s love had helped them leave the hospital. All of them said that her love had taught them they had worth, and that her love had kept them from returning to the hospital again. I don’t know how many such calls I received. I didn’t keep track. But I received enough of them that toward the end they were not unusual any more.

I never heard my dad swear or tell an off-colored joke. I heard my mom swear a couple times while we lived on the farm, but then “damn it to hell” was a perfectly appropriate way to express oneself when a cow puts her foot in a bucket of milk. I never received a spanking as a child, and as a teenager, I don’t think I was ever told I couldn’t do something I really wanted to do – not because I was spoiled, but because they let me know they trusted my judgement – and implicit in that trust was the unspoken warning that I jolly well better do what was right.