

Steven Brunk

(Pop's Nephew)

Memories of Uncle Don are far from singular, yet they are consistent in their form. The Uncle who lives on an enormous ranch by the Snake River, right below the Grand Tetons. Is this place even real? Visiting in all seasons meant relating with a man who commanded respect yet was so easy going. Don gave you the rules of engagement, and then you were on your own. He'd let you succeed or fail and then calmly deal with the consequences. I had a few, I'm sure. The blaring one for me is the yellow snowmobile I accidentally rammed into the corner of the house, I think. That was a classic, city-kid move of throttle over brake! Bent the shit out of one of the skis, I believe, but Don stayed cool when he saw it. We talked about it last summer in Jackson, at The Wort Hotel over breakfast. He made sure to let me know he remembered the incident as clear as day. I literally felt like a kid again while he recounted the tale.

I have many memories of the ranch, all of them amazing. In winter, when Don would meet us at the road and pack us into the Thiokol, and begin that 5 mph journey through the snow to the house, my eyes would absolutely light up. This was the real deal. Uncle Don would tell stories the entire way - never with a lull in the conversation. Arriving at the house was surreal, after traipsing through deep snow for half an hour.

Seeing all five of those big cousins of mine was both exciting and intimidating as hell. Josie's warm embrace and sweet voice never changed. Steady as the rock she was.

When Uncle Don needed to be tough, he wouldn't hesitate. Those boys would go after each other every time we visited. Man, some of those scraps scared the snot outta me! Don was quick to stroll in calmly and settle the dust so we could move on. This further etched his lofty status in my mind. He was a boss. This was his place. You play by the rules, or you don't play. Don't believe I ever saw him angry though. Amazing.

These are the core of my memories in Jackson, beyond the myriad of hikes, skis, rafting, etc. I'll cherish them forever. I can't imagine not having an Uncle who lived where he did. He helped shape my undying love of nature, the mountains, and open spaces. Eternally grateful.