

# **Pops Memorial**

*By Greg and Ali Brunk*

It is uniquely unfair to be assessed entirely on the merits of the golden years of your life, but such is the nature of being a grandfather. After a lifetime of service, leadership, and labor - and that was just raising 5 boys - Pops was entitled to a bit of grumpy. But like in all the patterns of his life, he chose a more steadfast and loving approach. Spend time among the fourteen new critics he inherited during the latter season of his life, and you will hear nothing but love, adoration, and joyful memories. He was peaceful, wise, and encouraging... what more could you want from a grandfather? And I knew Pops only as that grandfather. I cannot speak to him as homesteader, a serviceman, a pastor, a pilot, a scratch golfer, a rancher, a senator, or even a hometown legend... just simply as a grandfather. And as grandfathers go, he was the best anyone has ever had.

Alison and I had the deeply special honor of sharing life with Pops during the final year of his life. It was an incredibly sad and difficult year for him in many ways. After losing his lifetime conspirator and constant companion, he was no longer whole. He was sad in a way that I don't think I will ever truly comprehend. His work on this earth complete, his home empty at night (except on those nights when Stephen and Christy would lovingly stay in the guest room), he was ready to go be with his Father. But as signs of fall started to settle on Jackson Hole, something genuinely wonderful started to happen. Bit by bit, in spite of having every right to resignation and defeat, Pops began to choose again a more steadfast and loving approach.

He took my wife Alison on a dinner date to the Elk Refuge Museum, because he thought she deserved to feel special every once in a while (gulp... oops). In spite of the fact that even putting on boots in the morning was an exhausting enterprise, Pops was always at my door at 7:15 on Tuesdays, so we could be early to breakfast just in case Dave Neville showed up and needed a little comfort and a few laughs in his own difficult season. He started to look forward to the little things again. I remember him asking out of the blue if we could all take a trip to Thermopolis before the snow hit to poke around town and see some old sights. At his request, we began a weekly adventure to try every new restaurant in town, so he could get a sense of how much Jackson was evolving. He even booked a ticket to fly to Cincinnati and spend a season with my parents and his grandchildren. He was actually looking forward to all that travel, in spite of his age.

He was not whole, but he remained steadfast and loving. He never abandoned his daily fellowship with the Lord or his welcoming spirit for family and friends. In the end, in spite of everything, he was content and even happy at times. I remember, while we were watching a football game together, a black cat ran out onto field and juke a few defensive ends before escaping into the stands. I have never heard Pops belly laugh like that. I can still hear it today. At one point that same night, I felt a jolt of panic as I looked over to find Pops up on a ladder winding an old wall clock, shooing away my attempts to help him down. It was a night full of laughs. The next morning, we discovered Pops had gone to be with his wife and Father in paradise. The scene was peaceful, his sheets hardly even disturbed. As we gathered with the McDonalds and prayed over him that morning, I got the overwhelming sense that God had worked a miracle that night. A final act of love from a merciful father to a faithful son, a blessing of peaceful sleep to honor a man who spent his life in service to his family, his country, and his God. I really believe the Lord waited to let Pops move on until he was back on top of his game. How cool is that?

Just before he passed, a painting of Pops in front of his aspens at 95 Ranch made its way into a fairly well recognized artist's collection under the title "The Groundskeeper". He adored that title, and he shared with us that it was how he truly wished to be remembered. A humble groundskeeper and simple caretaker. We will do our best to uphold the facade.

