

Horace Rice Harrod, Sr.

They say you can't beat Father Time but you can sure take him into extra innings. Tom Brokaw's book, "The Greatest Generation" best describes this good man, his peers, and what they stood for. Born September 17, 1917, Dad survived two world wars, the Great Depression and two world pandemics. These events served to temper his mettle along with his peers making them humble, frugal, appreciative, and resilient. When I think about this generation, they can't be described without using the word sacrifice. They came back from World War II, put away their uniforms and went to work without fanfare and building much of the infrastructure we still enjoy today. When thanked for being a "Hero," they would all be quick to correct you saying, "I wasn't a hero. The ones that didn't come back were the heroes."

One of 14 children, Dad was fourth youngest and the seventh of eight sons. Both his parents died by the time he was 15 and the younger children still at home were farmed out to older married brothers and sisters. Dad went to live with his older brother Bob, and after finishing eighth grade, went to work farming with his brother. He was always conscious of his meager education yet he was creative and intuitive figuring out how things worked and coming up with ingenious ways to fix things or solve a problem. His solutions weren't always pretty but they seemed to work. As with most old farmers, he was part engineer, part mechanic, a country veterinarian and sometimes a doctor for himself. It was pretty common to see him dip a sliced finger in kerosene, wrap it up in an old dirty handkerchief and finish setting tobacco.

In World War II, he served in the 28th Infantry Division, which was the Pennsylvania National Guard mobilized for the War. After doing Basic Training at Fort Polk, LA, he was sent to Camp Carabell, FL where he attended communications school learning Morse Code along with doing amphibious assault training on vessels out in the gulf. He was shipped to Cardiff Wales where training continued in anticipation of the D-Day invasion. His division landed on Omaha Beach a few days after D-Day and began fighting in earnest as the hit, "hedgerow" country in southern France. The 28th division is credited with the liberation of Paris although Dad said they never fired a shot as the Germans had already retreated. According to him, it was the hardest day of marching they ever did as they were marched up and down the streets of Paris all day to show the Parisians that the Americans were there. I understand the grateful Parisians were quick to offer the soldiers wine and many were "overserved" in the process.

The 28th continued to engage the German army across France, Belgium, Luxembourg and into Germany. After taking Kommerscheidt and Vossenack, the infantry crossed the Kall River gorge into Schmidt where his regiment was run over by German tanks staging for the battle of the bulge. Historically this was part of the Battle of the Hurtgen Forest. His infantry unit had little to no armor support as the American tanks could not get across the Kall River bridge leading to Schmidt. The regimental command post was taken along with all the senior officers. Dad and 16 other soldiers decided to make a run for it and successfully made it over the top of the gorge where they were under fire for three days and nights but inaccessible to the German tanks. On the fourth night they were able to get down to the Kall River by holding hands and managed to ford the river making it back to American lines. Dad suffered frozen feet during this battle and was evacuated first to a field hospital then to a hospital in Paris before being shipped back to a hospital in England where they managed to save his feet. For him the fighting was over but it was nearly a year later before he would return home.

Once home he returned to farming with his brother Bob and in 1947 married my mother Charlotte White Harrod in a double wedding ceremony with her brother Doss on Christmas Eve. They were a little older in marrying than most because of the war and Mom used to say she refused to marry any 4-F army rejects that were still in the states during the war. She sure got a good man in Dad. They were married for 66 years before Mom passed away in 2014. Dad operated a tobacco and dairy farm until he moved to Crestwood and began working for the Kentucky Department of Transportation as a heavy equipment operator in 1963. He would remain in the house they bought until he passed away less than a month short of his 106th birthday.

Dad loved baseball and the New York Yankees. He was also an avid University of Kentucky sports fan celebrating the wins and suffering through each loss. He was proud of his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren taking great joy in watching the great grandkids have fun. What an example he set for us all. It makes me proud to hear one of my sons or grandchildren speak of lessons he taught us all, not even knowing that he was. Work ethic comes to mind first as he was a hard worker his entire life and had no quit in him when the going got tough. I recall him raking hay in front of the baler well into his 90's. It would have been easier for him to stay home watching a ballgame but if there was work to be done, he was going to be involved. He was selfless to a fault.

He was a man of strong convictions. He believed that when operating a tractor with a loader, you had to raise the bucket or bale spike as high as it would go in order to see better. It was up to the barn doors and power lines to move out of his way. Technology sometimes confounded him and when we got him his first cell phone, we told him he could call his sister Madlyn in Florida without running up those dreaded long-distance charges his generation were terrified of. After a little training, he gave it a shot but when the call didn't go through, he explained that the tiny battery in that cell phone just didn't have enough power to push that call all the way to Florida. Recall that he was a communications sergeant in the army and carried the field radio's that were the size of concrete block and probably had a maximum range of 2 miles.

As he aged, he lost most of his hearing and despite getting hearing aids, he refused to wear them. We had a black lab named Beauty and for nearly ten years he would call her "Judy." We just thought this was his pet name for her until one day (after ten years) he asked Tony what our dog's name was and learned it was Beauty and not "Judy." Beauty didn't seem to mind though.

When Dad was in his 90's our youngest son Jordan was in the police academy and he got to come home one holiday week to ride around with a field training officer here in Oldham County. It was a rainy day and except for a few traffic accidents mostly quiet. Then a call comes over the radio that there had been a hit and run in Crestwood. The offending vehicle was a blue chevy pickup registered to one Horace Harrod address Hillcrest Court in Crestwood. The FTO looked at Jordan and Jordan responded, "Yep that's my grandpa." As it turns out Dad had gone to get a haircut and when pulling out of his parking space, he had clipped the fender of car next to him without realizing it. The owner got his plate number and called it in as a hit and run. We like to tell the story that on Jordan's first day as a police officer he had to arrest his grandpa.

I had my Dad for 70 years! As I look back on the many memories, I think about all the things he taught me; work hard, be honest, be resilient, treat people fairly, stand up for yourself, don't quit, be fiercely proud of your family. I learned from him every day. He taught me how to live and he showed me how to die.