

My Dad, Quite a Guy

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My dad just turned 89 this week. And he is quite a guy.

Marvin Edmund Drenkow was born on February 12th—Lincoln's birthday—in 1917, during the First World War. Growing up in South Dakota, Dad heard the stories of how his Grandpa and Grandma Winter and their companions emigrated from Germany in the 1860s and pioneered a settlement on the prairie.

Although Dad often tells me his "horse tales," his greatest love was for "the good old John Deere tractor."

Dad became—or perhaps was born—very "mechanically inclined," inventing all sorts of devices, some of which (like his motorized water pump) were actually more Thomas Edison than Rube Goldberg.

It was a rugged but good life on the land, chores rewarded at night with farm-fresh food and Jack Benny on the radio.

Then the hard times hit. Locusts. Dust storms. The Depression.

Grandpa ended up working the farm for the bank. In eighth grade, Dad was pulled from the one-room schoolhouse to work full-time on the

farm, his brothers grown and out on their own. Dad would sometimes drive a truck with his brothers, hauling cola, beer, or even grapefruits from Texas.

Then like a one-two punch, with the nation still reeling from the Great Depression, Pearl Harbor was attacked. The nation went to war. Now a young man, Dad moved to California and found work in a defense plant. Myra Schmidt, whom he had dated in South Dakota, had also moved to California. She and Dad became quite an item, enjoying their free time in the exciting big city of Los Angeles.

One day, some guys Dad worked with asked him to drive them out to Riverside (Dad was the only one frugal enough to have saved and bought a car, hard to come by during the War). They wanted to take the test for the U.S. Army Air Force. They convinced him to take the test, too. He thought it foolish, with his poor education, but said why not?

And wouldn't you know it, he was the only one who passed the test!

[It was omitted from the article that Dad gave up his automatic deferment, working in a defense plant, to volunteer for service, at the height of the war. He wasn't cocky, just patriotic.]

He was sent down South, from base to base, for the regimen of training. Mom followed; and on July 1, 1944, they married.

That was something of a scandal. Dad, a Lutheran, marrying Mom, a Catholic (how she would raise me); but their love conquered all doubters.

Despite his meager formal education—and being up against high-school and college graduates—Dad graduated second in his class in flight school! (I asked him how he passed what amounted to college physics courses. He said it reminded him of what he had learned tinkering around with machinery on the farm!).

Dad won the coveted position of fighter pilot.

But the war was nearing an end. Recuperating in a hospital from a bout with pneumonia, Dad saw an endless parade of amputees. From that day onward, Dad hated war with a passion.

After the war, Mom and Dad returned to Los Angeles, where his sister Irma and their friends from South Dakota, Marlo and Glyda Bates, lived. During the week, Mom took the streetcar to work in the Union Bank downtown. Dad went to work for Northrop; he helped build "The Flying Wing," predecessor to the modern stealth bomber.

In his spare time he also sold popcorn and candy out of vending machines, but good locations were hard to find.

Finally, Dad returned to his first love: driving trucks. He saved his money and bought a ready-mix cement truck—the business he worked in, as an independent driver, till he retired, in 1986.

Dad worked long hours, five and a half days a week, and provided Mom and me with all we needed. In the late Sixties, my dad and Uncle Shorty, Irma's husband, bought a place in Carpinteria. They fixed up a cabin, and our families spent many wonderful weekends relaxing on "the world's safest beach" or fishing on the ocean in Dad's little boat. My cousins Collette, Janet, and Charlotte are still like sisters to me.

In the late Seventies, I went off to college at U.C., Davis. Dad had worked long and hard to put me through college, but perhaps the best lesson I learned is that nothing is more important than family.

When Dad retired, we created and sold woodcraft together. Mom liked to paint the wooden figures I cut out of wood. Dad made the best doggone doghouses!

Mom passed away suddenly in 1996, a year and a half after their Golden Wedding Anniversary. Dad and I were devastated, but we picked each other up and carried on. We enjoy watching sports, especially the Lakers, together. Dad is a wonderful cook, his homemade pizza known far and wide!

Whether it was helping his father on the farm, his brothers with their truck, his country during the war, or his wife and son with anything and

everything they needed, my dad has always given his all for those he loved.

Like I say, he's quite a guy.