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Forum

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The Cookie Jar

By Dick Naegele

In October of 2004, my mother passed on at a hospice facility in Bristol, Tennessee. She had been very sick for an extended period of time, and was allowed to die with dignity and in comfort in a beautiful facility with loving and caring staff attending her final needs.

She was in room with a full set of living room furniture, a small kitchenette for the family, and a door to a patio and garden. It was a very peaceful and tranquil place for both my mother, and the family to experience her passing.

When my mom had drawn her last breath, I had moved outside to the patio to cry and to be by myself in my grief. A minister that volunteered at the hospice house, came outside to comfort me. He told me something that really stayed with me. He said to rejoice in her passing on to a place where she no longer suffered the pain that had been her life for the past 2 ½ months. He also said whenever I felt sad, to reach deep in my mind and pull out a

memory from the past, and dwell on it until the sadness passed.

I gave that concept a little thought. I somehow wandered back to my childhood in Barneveld, NY, when mom would have cookies in a jar on a shelf above our sink. Whenever I was really good, or when I woke up from a nap, she would either reach in there, or allow me to dip in there, and pull out a cookie. Those cookies always put a smile on my face as a young boy. I would sit at our kitchen table, and she would take the old fashioned bottle of milk from the fridge, shake it to mix the cream with the milk, and pour me a glass of cold milk to have with my cookie.

I have that memory firmly affixed in my mind, along with many others that bring a smile to my face when the dark clouds of life try to cover the sun.

I grew to think of those great memories as cookies. I came up with the idea of taking my mothers cookie jar, and placing memories in it, written on small pieces of memo paper. I placed that cookie jar on the workbench in my woodworking shop. That shop is where I go to relax and contemplate the problems of the world. It is a place where I escape from the world and de-compress, when I am stressed, or simply want to relax and think. Sometimes I dip in the cookie jar and pull up a memory, read it and sit in my chair, at my work table and contemplate the memory. I drift back in time, lean back in my chair, close my eyes, and I am back in the 50's with my dad running beside my first two wheeled bicycle. I can smell the odor of the cooling solvents he worked with at Chicago Pneumatic. I used to run to the door when he arrived home from work, and hug his leg. I would stand on his shoe top, and hug that leg, and he would walk with me firmly attached, to the kitchen where he would kiss my mom hello.

There are memories in there of being picked up as a young boy, and placed on the seat of a 14 foot rowboat with a 7 HP motor. My father

and grandfather had totally refurbished that boat. He and dad has sanded every inch, inside and out, and had refinished the inside ribs with spar varnish and painted the outside hull a two toned, light and dark green. On the transom, grandpa had painted the name "Donna Marie" after my little sister who was only an infant at the time. I was 7. My dad used to lift me into the boat while it was still on the trailer, and I loved to ride in the boat when he backed it into the water. I was always made to wear an old fashioned kapok life vest when we went fishing. I looked like a little orange tinted Michelin man, ha-ha. Grandpa would sit in the bow of the boat, I would sit in the middle, and dad would run the motor. He did little fishing, because he was too busy taking my fish off the hook and baiting it again with a night crawler.

There is a memory in there of helping my grandpa pick night crawlers in the back yard, when he ran Al's Bait Shop in Whitesboro. I was constantly killing one of every three, because I was too impatient to wait for them to relax enough to pull them slowly from their hole, and I would break them in half. Grandpa didn't care. He would simply take MY coffee can with all the dead worms and sort the live ones from the carnage that was the worms I collected. We were together and I was "helping". Gram and Gramp had a large boarding house dining table in their dining room. When we finished picking up worms, I would stand on a stool, and wash my hands in the kitchen sink with Ivory Snow soap flakes, and we would sit down to that big table for cocoa and a Hemstrought's molasses drop cookie or two.

Sometimes I simply read one of the little memory slips, and then fire up the saws and dive into my little world scented with the smell of fresh sawed wood, and the hum of power tools.

However I choose to rejoice in the memory, whether it be in quiet contemplation, or in whistling while I work busily on a wood project, I find it ALWAYS works to take away

sadness and heartache. It soothes the soul, and refreshes the mind.

So, if you choose to use a cookie jar or a cardboard shoe box, choose a container that suits your fancy, and make some little memory slips to drop in there. I still drop slips in there often when an especially fond memory comes to mind. My cookie jar is quite full of memories, as is my mind.

There is a real serenity and tranquility in the process of dipping into the "cookie jar" and drifting to a place far away while nibbling on one of those "cookies."

Having watched my dad drift away to join my mom in a place far away, but tranquil and peaceful, this past week, I will surely have to find a bigger cookie jar quite soon. I "smell" a whole new batch of cookies baking as we speak.

God bless you all, and may you find peace and happiness in your "cookie jar" as I do in mine.

In loving memory of my mom and dad. Janice Gaylord Naegele, May 31, 1926-October 27, 2004, and to Kenneth A. Naegele, April 10, 1924-October 31, 2008.

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