

Grandpa and Pop

I had two grandfathers. My mother's father we called "Grandpa," and my father's father we called "Pop."

Grandpa was a tall, stately man with an erect bearing. He spoke in a loud and deliberate voice, perhaps because he was losing his hearing. I don't recall ever seeing him work with his hands, either as a mechanic taking care of the ranch equipment or in the fields during harvest time. From what I observed, and now remember, he would drive his late-model Oldsmobile into town each day to conduct his business, which was to pick up the mail, do the household shopping, talk to his friends, and check in with his banker. When I first knew him as Grandpa, he must have been retired and left the hands-on management of the ranch to the "boys." But make no mistake, he was in charge nonetheless. I realized even then that the "boys" never crossed him and were careful never to drink alcohol in his presence. He was the aristocratic patriarch of the family ranch, and no one forgot it.

Pop walked with a limp from an injury he had received during his railroad work in Colorado. Pop was a working man. He was a rice irrigator for the Zumwalt Company, a corporate rice grower headquartered in Colusa County. Carrying his shovel, he walked the levies in the rice fields, managing the water in the fields assigned to him. He left early in the morning and returned in the latter part of the afternoon. His work did not seem physically taxing, unless one of his rice checks broke, but he was on his feet all day long, patrolling and adjusting the water levels in the rice fields. In spring, he sowed watermelon and cantaloupe seeds in the rice checks, and in the late summer, he harvested large, sweet melons to bring home.

Pop always had a stick of gum in his pocket for his grandchildren. We looked forward to his coming home because we could already taste our expected treat. And he never failed us, even when he sometimes pretended he had forgotten or when he cautioned us that our grandmother wouldn't approve of his gum giving. On those occasions, he slipped the gum to us with the admonition, "Don't say a word."

Pop was a soft-spoken man who dared not argue with his wife. He accepted her leadership and final judgment in all family matters. He seemed to me to be a man without temper, easy-going, a steady worker, and a man who enjoyed a drink now and again, but not in his own home, that's for sure. As I recall now, more than 50 years later, he was a pipe smoker.

I, too, am a grandfather. Amy's first child, Caroline, was born February 10, 1995 at 2:02 a.m., and I was present to witness the event. I don't feel I am as old as Grandpa or Pop were at the time when I recognized their status as grandfathers, but the fact is, by the time that Caroline comes of age, I certainly will be.

I don't feel overcome or overwhelmed by my new status. I have always been slow to adjust to new realities and to internalize them, and I am sure that will be the case now. Without doubt, what has impacted me thus far is the maturity that Caroline's mother exhibited. Very low-key, very matter-of-fact, and very laid back about the whole birth affair. If I did not know better, I would have to assume this young woman had been a mother many times over. It is a pleasant surprise for a parent to see such a calm and seasoned maturity exhibited by one's own daughter.

I wonder if my grandchildren will someday view me as a patriarch or as a friendly, gum-giving grandfather?

