

Countdown to Profound: Day 10,560

by Bill Coley (posted online, February 6, 2014)

My journey to the confluence of my and my grandpa's ministry tenures concluded on Friday with a complex, challenging, at times overwhelming day. With the passage of time will come additional insights (and images), but for this post, here are some notes and reflections:

The day began in Sioux Falls then moved back to the small town that is home to the care facility in which my aunt lived. As noted in a previous entry, my cousin consented to my request to be the one who delivered the news of my aunt's return to Sioux Falls. I did that. My aunt was pleased. But the most important piece of the conversation came as I prepared to leave.

To understand this, you must understand that by nature we Coleys are not fluent in the language of love, or at least not in the linguistics of love. We're nice to each other and rarely speak ill of one another behind each other's backs, but we tend to allow our actions to speak far louder than our words when it comes to expressing love.

So when my aunt told me she loved me "so much" (a phrase of art that I speak often to my glorious nieces) and that I was on her mind...always, well, my day, and probably trip, was made.

But that encounter was but the first of many layers I would experience during the day.

On the way to Council Bluffs I received a text from Dan Van Hoe (an East Moline funeral director) telling me that Lois Danver had died. Lois was a long time member of our church who recently moved to a new care facility, a lady I thought about visiting on the way out of town the other day but didn't. So when I received word of her death, I wrestled with a lot of guilt, a force I didn't subdue for several hours (more in a moment).

From the ecstasy of a brief but inspirational visit with my aunt to the sad, emotionally complicated news of the death of one of our people...in the span of a half hour.

But the day was just beginning to unfold.

I drove to the church, there welcomed by an enormously kind and gracious church office manager, Bev Ondracek. She had prepared a place for me in the front of the worship center, gave me free reign over the building, even had I stayed after she went home, and generally blessed my visit. Thank you, Bev.

With her escort I walked into the worship center and found my place in the company of the portraits displayed in this post and a couple of the church's past pictorial directories. I stared at the portraits, cried soft and low-pressure tears over their sentimental significance, and took pictures/videos of a handful of directory images as well as several aspects of the building.

I stayed for in the church for 90 minutes. I felt moved and honored to be there, especially when I stood in the small side room off the front of the worship center which my family and I occupied in 1965 during grandpa's funeral, and in the pulpit from which grandpa had preached and I had helped people celebrate my parents' lives.

But I didn't feel as overwhelmed as I expected to feel. It was good, right, even necessary that I was there - it was the church my grandpa had built, for goodness' sake! But it was not the emotional maelstrom I expected. In part, perhaps because 1) never in my adult life has that church building symbolized grandpa to me; and 2) because of a series of significant renovations, much of the structure I inhabited as a child and teen no longer exists - it's not the same church anymore (nor should it be!)

Those reflections came much later in the day, however, meaning that as I drove away from the building and toward the cemetery I wasn't sure what to make of the lack of emotional fireworks. As I entered the cemetery and made my way up the hill and around the winding paths to the gravesite, I felt a good deal of uncertainty: What if my emotional outpouring here is no stronger than it was at the church? I wondered. It turned out that I needn't have worried.

The flood gates opened almost as soon as I exited my car. I cried hard, long, and, to use the word first deployed in my April newsletter column about this trip, wildly. Not panicked tears. Not unwanted tears. But robust, cleansing, and necessary tears that my soul needed in order to feel included in the day's events.

It's not necessary nor probably even healthy to report the details of my emotional earthquake. Suffice it to say that it was fueled primarily by my profound love and adoration for my grandparents, as well as some poignant struggles of the soul that I didn't resolve while at the cemetery and probably won't anytime soon.

After 45 minutes or so - most of it spent wrestling with an emotional avalanche, including a couple of moments I recorded while seated on the ground next to the headstone, videos that will always remind me of the depths of today's experience - I told my grandparents I had to leave and that I would always love and never forget them. I then returned to my car, sent Shari a text, and drove away in search of something - anything - to do other than what I had just done.

Ten minutes later I ended up at a shopping mall parking lot, unable to think of anything other than Lois Danver's death, its impact on her people, and the fact that I hadn't seen her when I had the chance. So I called the person responsible for the arrangements, expressed my sadness and support, then confessed my struggle with not having been around. Once she heard the reason for my being out of town, she voiced tender, gracious, and marvelously authentic support. At last, the guilt was gone.

So Friday was a multi-layered journey that showcased - make that imposed - a variety of emotions. The tears I cried at the church expressed respect and admiration for my grandpa. The waterfall I produced at the cemetery was rooted in love beyond words or explanation given the brevity of my encounters with him and grandma.

It was a day of highs and lows, joys and sadness, peace and unrest... just as I expected it to be.