

The Last Handshake

My dad was not much of a hugger with us kids. I do remember him hugging mother many times, but with me I think that he wanted to show affection the manly way – by shaking hands. This was his way of showing that he loved me, and that he considered me as a grown-up – an equal, in a way.

If you know how, you can put a good bit of feeling into a handshake. The preacher that baptized me (Olan Bassham) always emphasized a good, strong, handshake. We would try to make him proud when he offered his hand, and the prize was when he said, “My, that’s a good one!”

My cousin Steve remembers that, too, and when we meet we always greet each other with a firm handshake. We are not trying to overpower each other – just announcing our feeling for each other.

The strong handshake has sometimes backfired on me, especially when I am a little bit too enthusiastic with older ladies. They shrink back when I apply too much pressure, and I’m lucky I haven’t hurt one of them. I try to ease off a bit when I greet them now.

As dad got older and began to fade, he eventually moved to the assisted living place where my mother, who had Alzheimer’s, was staying. I visited him regularly, and he always gave me a good handshake in greeting. One day in October of 2012, I came to see him and he was still in bed. The nurses said that he had not been feeling well. I came to the bedside and spoke to him, and he automatically reached out to shake my hand. It was a really strong, lingering handshake, and as I tried to talk to him I could see that he was not really doing very well.

He died a few days later, from some type of bladder infection that eventually led to, pneumonia. I came to realize that he was out of time, and I know that our handshake was the last real communication that we ever had in this life. But I expect him to greet me with similar feeling when I see him again in the next.