

Published in the Pasadena Star News on June 16, 2012

The one time Dad brought out the brandy

My dad was not known for conversing with his children as we were growing up. I had my first real conversation with him, meaning he wasn't yelling at me, when I was 17. We took a day trip to a historic site near our small Ohio home. It was hot and humid and he complained to me that he was sweating. It wasn't much, but it was a start.

I had an arms-length relationship with my dad when I was young. It wasn't until I got to middle age that I experienced a tender moment with my Dad that I will treasure forever.

I blessed my parents with two beautiful grandchildren. We visited often when the kids were small. After they were grown, they didn't accompany us because of jobs, school and the path of their own adult lives. My parents, husband and I sat with one another, middle-aged and old-aged, lamenting the state of politics and society.

My parents moved from Ohio to Arizona after they retired. My husband and I drove across the desert to visit them. We enjoyed "happy hour" and then an elegant dinner at the Hassayampa Inn in Prescott, their small mountain town.

One lovely summer evening, with a cool mountain breeze sifting through the dry Arizona air, my dad brought out a bottle of cognac that he got from his dad, more than 50 years earlier. We were relaxing after a wonderful dinner and the French brandy was a perfect end to the evening. Dad saved it for more than half a century, waiting for the right moment to share it.

I knew my dad had a very distant relationship with his own father. Having met my grandfather on only three occasions I could understand why. He was stern, almost menacing, with eyebrows that literally knit together in a frown. I knew, even as a child, that he struggled to be a patient grandpa to his son's progeny.

Fifty years later, we sat in my parent's spacious living room and watched the weathered mountains fade from azure blue to steel gray and then slowly blend with the star splashed western sky. The conversation was light; we were full of great food and wine, enjoying our leisure. When Dad brought out the cognac, he told us how old it was and that he had saved it for a special occasion.

The middle child of five, I suddenly became an honored guest. He carefully poured the cognac and graciously handed the glass to me. He was gentle, not menacing. His manner was genteel, not harsh.

He was my father and I was his daughter and we shared a moment that needed no explanation. I knew as I took the stemmed glass, delicately etched with long stemmed blossoms, that my dad expressed his feelings in the best way he knew how, and it was good enough.

This is the twelfth Father's Day since my dad died. I miss buying him a shirt and a (usually humorous) greeting card, but the memory of the evening when he chose to share the cognac with me will always bring great comfort.