

My Papaw - My Inspiration

By: Lakan Jerke

Everyone hopes to have a special person who plays a big part in their life, or a person who is their role model. For me, that was my grandpa! He was kind, loved others, and was a great grandpa. I was so blessed and fortunate to have him in my life!

My grandpa / Papaw, Jerry Nikirk, was diagnosed with leukemia cancer in July 2018. He went through so much. The doctor said he could stay in the hospital and undergo intense treatment with the hope to prolong his life by a few years, or he could go home and live a couple of days. My family decided to allow him to try the treatment and fight for a few more years to have him with us! We were not ready to let him go. There were many more memories to make! My Papaw made it approximately four weeks in the hospital and when the doctors said there was no more hope, they allowed him to go home on hospice to be able to pass peacefully in the house he built for my mom and her family with his own hands. He made it two days at home before he passed away on the night of August 9th, 2018.

The day before he passed, we went to visit him (which is about an hour and fifteen minutes from where we live), but had to drive home that evening because we had school the next day. A vivid memory I have is when we were getting ready to walk out, he mouthed "I love you!" to me. My mom went back up to be with him the next day while my sisters and I went to school. Mom was only there for a short while when she knew something was not right. She called the Hospice nurse to come quickly. When the nurse arrived at his house, she said it wouldn't be much longer before he passed. My mom called my dad to let him know. He immediately came to school to pick us up early. We wanted to make it to see him again before he passed away. Thankfully, we made it and I was able to tell him goodbye. After he passed, his pastor took myself and the other grandkids into the room next door to be with us as a support.

Papaw was a huge part of my life. Holidays are always hard. Anniversaries and other special days are hard, too. It always makes my family sad. It has been difficult since he left. BUT, his legacy lives on within me and my family and he still inspires me today! It's still hard to believe he's gone. It's hard to get used to living without a family member. I know other people have had it far worse. One thing I know is that he was ready to go. My Papaw was a God-fearing man. I am glad to know that he did good things and is now with God.

My Papaw wasn't perfect, no one is except Jesus. When you lose someone it makes you realize how much you love them. Thinking about how much I loved my Papaw makes me think about how much God loves us. I also know that my Papaw is in a good place. Papaw wouldn't want us to be sad. It is always great to have friends and family there for you. One of my

closest friends was even there for the funeral. She is great and would cry with me. She knew my Papaw. Papaw would be silly and tease her and she was there for my family.

My Papaw and I were super close, we were as close as syrup on pancakes. When we stayed at his house, in the mornings he would take us to get breakfast at McDonald's. Before we would leave to go to McDonald's for breakfast, he would take everyone's order. My Papaw knew everyone at McDonald's... both customers and workers. He never met a stranger. He would tease and laugh with all who were around him. He would say, "If you find someone I don't give a hard time to, then you have found someone I don't like."

Another memory is when my baby cousin would start crying... Papaw would sing her a song. The song goes, "Tell me a story, tell me a story, tell me a story and I'll go to bed." The song would ALWAYS calm her down. We still google that song at times just to be reminded of his gentleness and amazing heart.

Often, we had big family dinners together. Afterwards, we would sit around the dinner table and my Papaw would tell us stories of when he was younger. I remember some of the stories he shared were of the practical jokes he played on people. One time he was camping with friends and hid their grill. When their friend began looking for his grill, he began to shine a flashlight up in the treetops. Papaw asked him what he was doing and he said, "If I were Jerry, where would I have put that grill? In a crazy place like a treetop." He loved to laugh and have fun with others. Another story he told was when he was still in grade school. He was in the choir, but the teacher actually went up to him and told him he shouldn't sing... and just to move his mouth without making a sound. We laughed and laughed at this story. We would have to disagree with that teacher. We loved hearing him sing.

My Papaw went to a church called Tabernacle of Praise. He was very involved there and volunteered in many ways. One way was he worked on the security team. The church actually built a new facility where education classes are available. Our family was told that the new building will be named after my Papaw and called the "Jerry Nikirk Education Center." We can't wait until we see that sign on the side of the building! He left an incredible legacy for not only his family, but everyone he was around.

Every year we would go to Holiday World, a theme park in Southern Indiana. We would ride the different roller coasters and rides, go to lunch and spend the afternoon in the water park called Splashin Safari. Papaw would sit under an umbrella in the little kids water slides section to watch us play. Next, we would hit the Lazy River where we floated around several times. Papaw loved splashing us under the waterfalls. After swimming for a while, he would go to the snack area and get all of his grandkids Dole Whip, a pineapple flavored ice cream. He loved to spoil all of us! When my mom would say no to a treat or a sweet, Papaw would say, "This is the house of YES." Mom would say that it definitely wasn't "The House of Yes"

when she was growing up there. Papaw would always just chuckle and still get his grandkids treats. Lastly, we spent the evening in Thanksgiving Land. There is a ride called, "Turkey Shoot." On this ride, you try to shoot the Turkey targets. We loved competing against Papaw. Sometimes I think he would let me win. Our family decided that we will continue going every year to carry on the tradition.

When we were at his house, we always played outside. Papaw bought enough bicycles that every grandkid had one for them at his house. He also purchased electric scooters for us to ride, too. All of the cousins would play Capture the Flag after dark. My Papaw made the flags for us out of a broom pole and a cut out t-shirt. He could fix or build anything. He even built their house. There is nothing he couldn't do.

Another great memory was that Papaw would always buy each grandchild's first milkshake for them when they turned one. We have a video of him feeding me my very first milkshake at my first birthday party. That is a great memory I will cherish forever. My youngest cousin was born after Papaw passed away and my Mimi (his wife) carried the tradition on and bought Asher his first milkshake on his first birthday. We know Papaw was smiling down on us that day (and many other days).

Mimi and Papaw owned a motorhome. We would often go camping together in the motorhome. We would ride our bikes all over the campground, go fishing, and make delicious s'mores. One time when we made them, after my mom roasted hers over the campfire, she put it in the microwave and it exploded in the motorhome. My sisters, Mimi, and Papaw were all still outside wondering what that sound was. We laughed and laughed together. In the mornings, he would make pancakes on the griddle outside of the motorhome. We would sit on the picnic tables and eat breakfast together in the crisp morning air. I loved going camping with Papaw.

Cancer may have robbed us of a few years with Papaw, but it can never steal his legacy from us! Memories with my Papaw are endless. Papaw was kind to people, so that makes me want to be kind to others. I am so grateful I had a Papaw that was generous, loving, and God fearing. I hope I can be like him. He played a huge part in my life. I loved him so much! He is my inspiration!