

You've Done Good

by Kevin Myrick

Daniel remembered exactly what Pop looked like when he saw him for the last time. Pop was once a tall, proud man; a man's man who spent his life outdoors. Now he was bound to an oxygen tank kept next to the tattered recliner in front of the big floor-to-ceiling windows. He spent his days looking out on the lake. Maybe he dreamed of days in nature his failing flesh took from him. Daniel didn't really know.

His eyes were glassy as Pop's mind faded with each passing sunset. The live-in nurse told Daniel that he could hug him gently while he told him good news.

"I graduated from college today," Daniel said into his one good ear.

The old man turned to him and smiled. "I remember the day I graduated. It was the same day I met your mother."

"You mean Grandma?"

"I was a lineman for the Bulldogs," Pop said. "And after that I was a merchant marine."

Pop told stories Daniel had heard a million times, but it didn't matter. Pop would wheeze and cough, start up anew about the time he shot a hole-in-one on a Maui golf course as Daniel sat patiently and listened. He hoped to gain some wisdom, but there was none for Pop to give. For a fleeting moment, eyes seemed to clear and the man spoke as if he were coming out of the pea soup fog that formed over the lake on spring mornings.

"Son," he said. "You've done good."

He told the old man thanks but he didn't really know what he meant. It was hard to tell what Pop meant by anything anymore. All he had now were stories.

Daniel didn't know that would be the last time to see the old man. A year later, Daniel helped carry his heavy casket out of the funeral home, and flinched as the Navy men fired their rifles skyward. In those moments, Daniel thought about Pop's last words to him. Maybe he'd done good, but Daniel didn't believe he was a good man. Not a good man like Pop.

