

# The Greatest Man I've Ever Known

Yesterday, March 1, 2017, was my father's 110<sup>th</sup> birthday anniversary. Dad was born March 1, 1907—the same year that “The Duke” John Wayne was born. The 6'4” Duke passed away in 1979; my 5'6” father passed away in 1993.

Edwin J. (EJ) Baldwin was the eldest of five children. He was born in a little village in northern Michigan. My grandparents moved to Little Rock, Arkansas, shortly after Dad was born; and Dad and his siblings were all raised on a small farm outside of Little Rock. Dad didn't leave Arkansas until shortly before I was born. He passed away just a few days before his 86<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Dad was raised in a religious home; his father was a deacon in the church. However, by the time Dad was a teenager he had been totally turned off by the hypocrisy of dead religion and found his thrill at the bottom of a bottle. Though only a young man, Dad had mastered the art of moonshining and was known far and wide for the quality of his home-brewed whiskey.

Dad also mastered the welding trade. There were none better. He worked on projects all over the country, including the St. Louis arch. When Pearl Harbor was bombed, Dad and his two brothers marched down to the recruiter's office and signed up. One brother joined the Navy; the other brother joined the Marines and was wounded in the Pacific. Dad was in his mid-thirties when Japan struck our fleet in Hawaii (his brothers were much younger), and with his age and welding skills, Uncle Sam put Dad to work on a secret project that he never would divulge. As with most of the “Greatest Generation,” my dad was fiercely patriotic.

I remember driving my mother and father from my home at the

time on the Gulf Coast of Florida to my hometown of La Porte, Indiana (where Dad had moved shortly before I was born). As we made that 900-mile trip along Interstate 65, I was intrigued at something Dad did: he saluted every American flag that he saw en route. Every single one! I had never seen him do anything like that before. He passed away four months later. That trip was the last one Dad made on this earth. I have never forgotten it. Did Dad have a premonition that on this trip he was saying goodbye to "the land of the free" and about to head out to a land that is even freer? I think so.

As previously mentioned, Dad was a master welder. He came from a long line of craftsmen. His father was a carpenter. His one brother was a master plumber, and his youngest brother was a master machinist. These were hard-working, blue collar men that took great pride and personal satisfaction in the quality of their work. Their word was their bond; and they were as honest as the day is long. I never knew any of them to not keep their word—about anything.

My father lived through two world wars, the Great Depression, the Korean and Vietnam conflicts, and the assassination of President Kennedy. He went from riding on a horse and buggy to watching a man step foot on the moon.

As I said, Dad mastered the art of whiskey making as a young man. Unfortunately, he also became a slave to his product. It didn't take Dad long to become an alcoholic. Dad was never mean or physically abusive when he was drunk. Instead, he would go on binges in which he would ride the rails, hobbing all over the country. His drinking cost him his first family, and by the time he was in his early forties, his health was gone.

He entered the Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) program, and step number three of that program changed his life forever. The third step of the AA program says, "[We] made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we

understood Him.”

Well, Dad clearly didn't understand God (as he would say repeatedly) and set out on a journey to try and satisfy this third step in AA. His search took him to the High Street Baptist Church and Pastor Harvey Hicks in Little Rock. Harvey himself was a former alcoholic and, therefore, talked Dad's language. Harvey led my father to the Lord, and Dad's life was transformed forever. Not only did God save my father's soul, He healed my father's body. (And He didn't need Benny Hinn to do it.)

From the day Dad was converted to Christ to the day of his death some forty-six years later, Dad never touched another drink of alcoholic beverage. Say what you want; I know it was a divine miracle.

If you or a family member suffers from addiction (or if someone you know has a loved one who suffers from addiction), I will send you a CD (DVDs not available) of my father's true-life story as recorded on the international radio program "Unshackled," produced by the Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago, Illinois. There is NO CHARGE for this CD. Order Dad's true-life story here:

["Unshackled" – The Edwin J. Baldwin Story](#)

After Dad's conversion, he moved to the city of my birth and spent the rest of his life there. He became a chaplain in the La Porte County jail. Later, he became a chaplain in the Indiana State Prison (a maximum security prison) in Michigan City. I guess you could say I cut my ministerial teeth as a boy with my dad in the jails and prisons of northern Indiana.

More than anyone else, my dad taught me the value of hard work, honesty, and devotion to God. My father was 45 years old when I was born, and growing up, I had no clue as to how valuable being raised by a father who was old enough to be my grandfather would eventually be to me.

I heard Dad and Mom (she was almost 40 when I was born) talk about things that impacted their generation. At the time, it seemed old-fashioned to me. But as I grew older, I realized that I had been privileged to be personally educated and influenced by people who had lived in and experienced a world that was quickly passing away—a world that my peers had absolutely no insight to.

Think about it: my grandfather was born in 1880. My grandfather! That was only two generations ago for me; and this is 2017.

My father and grandfather were old school. They didn't believe in debt. The only thing I know that my dad borrowed money for was our house. If he couldn't afford it, he didn't buy it. It was that simple. When granddad passed away, he left no debts; and when my dad passed away, he left no debts.

When I graduated from high school and went to college, I had to work a full-time job in order to pay my own way. I worked in a factory, a grocery store, sold vacuum cleaners, and did whatever I had to do to pay my way through school. Dad couldn't afford to pay my way through college; and I didn't expect him to. There was no such thing as handouts or entitlements in the Baldwin household. If you got it, you worked for it. I learned that lesson early on when I got my driver's license and wanted my own car. You guessed it: I had to earn the money for it, buy my own gas and oil, insurance, car repairs, etc. But that life lesson has served me well throughout my life.

At the age of 23, my wife and I launched out by faith with no money and no financial backing of any kind to a city where I had never lived—and went to work. All I had was a deep faith in God and a strong willingness to work hard—both of which I learned from my father. And then, at the age of 58, my wife and I moved 2,600 miles across the country and did it again.

Can you imagine? When most men my age are looking for financial security and a comfortable retirement, I left all of that behind and started a brand new work in a city and State in which we had never lived and where we knew no one (except I did know Rick Jore who lives a few miles south of where we live and who remains my dear friend). And not only did we start a new fellowship from scratch, we started a fellowship that is not a non-profit organization, which means donations to our fellowship are not tax-deductible. Everyone said we were crazy; everyone said we would starve. But we are now in our seventh year, our fellowship is thriving, and I haven't missed a meal since moving here.

What I'm trying to point out is that everything I have done in my life, every risk I have taken, every step of faith I have made, every decision to defy the way it's "supposed" to be done, every decision to tackle any issue head-on (no matter how controversial or unpopular), every decision to back away from no enemy, every decision to be willing to change a long held theological position if I come to realize I was wrong—no matter how many feathers are ruffled or how much support I might lose—is ALL due to what I learned at the feet of and in the home of this remarkable man, Edwin J. Baldwin.

Oh, I should tell you this part of the story: my mother never had any children before me. She had been told by doctors that she had a medical condition that would prevent her from ever having children. But shortly after she and my dad were married, Dad started praying that the Lord would give them a son and that their son would grow up to be a preacher. And in spite of everything the doctors had told my mom—and at the age of almost 40—she gave birth to a little boy. And, well, that little boy grew up and became a preacher. And, of course, that little boy was me.

I still have vivid memories of my dad and the life lessons he taught me. I remember the stories he told me about growing up in the early years of the Twentieth Century; about the Great

Depression; about the war; about the time my granddad had to take a man's life in self-defense; about his drinking days; about the hobo jungles; about the welding jobs; about the spiritual revival that took place in Pendleton Prison after he told his life story to the inmates there; about the pain and sorrow his drinking had inflicted upon his first wife and my two half-sisters and the lifelong grief and remorse he had over all of that; about Harvey Hicks; and about his miraculous conversion.

Harvey Hicks died when I was a toddler, but I still remember how Mom had found out about it while Dad was at work. And after she called the factory where Dad worked and told him about Harvey's passing, Dad was overcome with such grief that he could not continue to work. His boss was a very kind and understanding man, and he let Dad come home for the rest of the day. I remember how grief-stricken Dad was when he heard that the man who had won him to Christ had passed away. Obviously, I never met Harvey Hicks. But I love that man. I love what he did for my dad. I'm looking forward to telling him how much I love him when it's my turn to join those great men in a much better place.

My dad has been in Heaven for over 24 years now, and he is still the most influential man in my life. I've never known a more courageous yet compassionate man. He was as hard as a nail and as soft as a pillow at the same time. He feared no one but God; and he loved God with all of his heart. He is the greatest man I've ever known.

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