

Strength, Laughter, and Love

By: Charlie Cates, CSCS

<http://selfmadefitness.com/>
charlie@selfmadefitness.com

I was one of many people who knew my grandfather, and he had profound impact on how I view the world. From as early on as I can remember, he always displayed the traits of strength, laughter, and love, and these would carry through to our most recent meeting. Even in the end, as his ability to communicate diminished, the importance of these three characteristics were messages that he was able to convey to me.

When I was a child it was an honor to have Grandpa compliment me on my physical strength, partly because I was weak and puny so it was more than a stretch to consider myself strong, but also because he himself radiated strength. When we would go to he and Grandma's condo, I always loved hearing about his new training routines and seeing the exercise equipment he had in his basement. He would often talk about how much time he would spend swimming or rowing throughout the week, times that seemed unfathomable to me while I was young. He had a chin-up bar mounted beneath a doorframe that was wrapped with beat-up tape to mark where to place your hands. It was fortunate he didn't make me pay the toll to enter the room because my attempts to complete a rep on that bar were often futile. And I still distinctly remember him telling me my arms looked strong when I was eleven after seeing me at the pool. The pride I felt on that day was immense.

Another thing I remember about Grandpa is how easily he could make me laugh. He always had stories, and while I'm sure some of them were more serious than others, the ones in which he would laugh at the ironies and strange idiosyncrasies of the world and himself were the ones I remember most from my childhood. While I don't remember him being a joke teller, his ability to find humor in his daily encounters with people is something that makes me laugh to this day.

Finally, Grandpa was a man of love. He loved his wife and family, he loved humanity, he loved the human mind, body, and soul, he loved the strength of the human spirit, and the inherent freedom that is endowed to us all from the moment we are born. He loved nature, exercise, animals, and challenge. He loved good, honest hard work. And he lived his life accordingly, staying faithful to these loves and the moral responsibilities that came along with them.

The last time I saw Grandpa he couldn't remember who I was and could barely put an audible, coherent sentence together. But, despite this hardship, he was able to compliment me on my strength shortly after I entered the room. Impressed with my grip and arms, he went on to tell a couple stories about his recent endeavors, which ended in laughter. Finally, before traveling down the hall to visit Grandma, who is also suffering from Alzheimer's, he turned to me and said, "Every day at lunch I go and sit with her. I've been going for over a year, and she used to barely talk to me. Now she doesn't talk to me at all when I sit with her, but it would make me so happy when she would." Even in his most basic state, one in which he had difficulty remembering his own grandchildren, he still fell back on strength, laughter, and love.

We all have different upbringings, different morals, different values, but by the same token we are all fundamentally human. It has been said that man's most basic needs are security, food, and love, and if any one of those three aren't met stress will result. If security is found through strength and laughter is food for the soul, then it is no surprise that Grandpa wasn't too stressed. But, I have to ask, where do you find strength in your life? Where do you turn to for laughter? Are you able to laugh at yourself and the world around you? Is there love in your life? Are you able to openly express this love and passion, and are you able to receive it as well?

Sometimes when the state of the world is constantly cast in darkness, we are unable to appreciate the bits of light that we see because we don't feel they are enough. But while you cannot read a book outside in the dead of night, you can still admire the beauty of the stars.

Here's to faith, strength, and passion.

Get big or die tryin'.

Charlie Cates
Self Made®, Owner

Charlie Cates is a strength and conditioning specialist and the owner of Self Made® (<http://selfmadefitness.com/>) in Chicago, IL. He has worked with competitive and everyday athletes of all ages and ability levels, from 9-year-old kids to NFL MVP's. He can be reached via e-mail at charlie@selfmadefitness.com.

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