

## Grandpa's Eulogy

By Justin J. Agoglia

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I want to first of all extend my gratitude to all the relatives, friends, and attendees who have come today to honor this great man, Joseph Vincent Agoglia, a person we have all come to love and cherish for many years. The amount of people who have shown up to pay their last respects is only a testimony to the lives he personally touched.

All of us have known him in a variety of roles: father, husband, uncle, cousin, grandpa, mentor, and great friend. I have been privileged to know him as my grandfather; or when I was a child, he was better known as "Pam-pa" or "Grandpa Garage." It is within this context I shall speak from and share of the greatness of this man.

Upon reflecting what I would say about the uniqueness of my grandfather, I have chosen, as best as I know how, to stay away from trite expressions. Instead, my desire is for you to see through the eyes of a child who has learned and still learning to love, appreciate, and honor him as I have grown older in my years.

But before I embark on this journey, I want to ask you a question: when you hear the name Joseph Agoglia, what word(s) immediately comes to mind? If you're like me, there is no single word to choose from. Let me share a few adjectives that come to mind: caring, strong, humorous, encourager, man of faith, thankful, real, singer, story-teller, unique (and I stress unique purposely), and last of all "master toolman." I'm sure there were some words you recognized and shared with me but, hopefully, there was at least one word that surprised you. For time's sake, I shall focus on just a few.

Probably one of my earliest memories I have of my grandfather was visiting him every Saturday with my father at his garage in Brooklyn, NY. As a seven-year-old boy, this was the highlight of my week. I was around many skilled mechanics, met several loyal customers, watched cars go up and down

hydraulic lifts, and observed several interesting tools come out of those large, Snap-On tool boxes. It was definitely NY's replica of Disneyland in the Burrows, well, at least for me.

There is one particular memory that stands out that I would like to share with you. On this occasion my dad allowed me to go home with grandpa for the evening. Grandpa and I would wait until all the mechanics were out for the evening because he had to lock up the shop. And once everything was secure, we would get into an old car and head toward grandpa's home in Malverne, Long Island.

Driving home was an experience to say the least. I could not believe how fast he drove on the highways. (Now I know where my dad got his professional driving skills.) Cars would weave in and out of the lanes without signaling what lane they were changing over to. Other great NY drivers would tailgate from behind. It was simply the NY leisure experience we have all felt before.

However, for some reason as I sat adjacent to this strong yet older man, I noticed something I had never sensed before – it was the *feeling of safety* I felt just being in his presence. No matter how poorly others were traveling or how fast he drove, I knew I would be home safe because he was my grandfather. Nothing could remove that sense of safety within me.

I point this out because this is the feeling we all long for in key relationships, the feeling that there is someone much stronger, much wiser, and much greater than ourselves who will lead us to the place we call "home" – the place of safety, the place where we can be vulnerable, and the place where we can experience love. And at that moment, my grandfather's presence was sufficient for me to feel safe no matter what was happening outside that car.

As most of you know, my grandfather was unique. I have never met anyone like him and probably will never see the likes of him within my lifetime. Where can you find someone who will respond with such timely sayings? For example, about a year and a half ago grandpa slept over our house. He would always

sleep in my bed, which was such a joy for me. Well, the following day, I met up with him at breakfast and one of the first things I asked him was how well he slept. He responded, "Oh, I slept great. It was comfortable as hell." Never have I equated a great sleep with the image of hell. But for my grandfather, it was his heart, only expressing his deep appreciation for sleeping in my bed.

Here's another great example of his timely remarks. In the summer of 1993, my brothers, my dad, my grandfather, and I decided to drive to Carlisle, PA. It was the big car show of the summer and we all looked forward to seeing old, beat-up cars, used tools, classic automobiles refurbished, and a lot of interesting memorabilia. We arrived about 9:30 p.m., on a Thursday evening, and decided to stop for dinner at a restaurant which was known for its homemade food. The buffet was still being served and, because our stomachs had full reign at that moment, we unanimously decided to get the buffet. There were a variety of foods to choose from.

On one end of the buffet stood a tall man wearing a white outfit and a white hat. In his hands he held a sharp knife and a long fork, ready to slice and serve some of the finest meats this restaurant had prepared.

As grandpa stood in front of this chef, he noticed three separate sections of meats. Grandpa asked politely what the first choice of meat was and the chef shared that it was their honey-baked ham. He then shuffled over to choice number two and asked the same question. The chef responded with, "fresh turkey." Grandpa then began to glance over choice number one, choice number two, and then choice number three. Meanwhile, as the chef waited to hear grandpa's meat selection, Grandpa responded with all sincerity and said, "I'll have that" (while pointing to section number three).

Shocked and dumbfounded, the chef responded, "Uuuuh....sir....those are scraps." Only my grandpa would make this kind of choice. It is this "realness" that I loved about him. There was no façade, no mask to hide behind. He was

just himself and that was it. It was this simplicity that he had which we all long for in our own lives.

There was one phrase that came to mind which I purposely chose to comment on last, that is, the idea of "Master Toolman." As most of you know, my grandfather by and large was a mechanic as well as a manager of a large, auto repair shop for most of his life. He worked very hard and did his best to provide for his family, something he succeeded at several times over. In spite of his hard work and great sacrifice, I have chosen to focus on the idea of him being a master toolman.

Every apprentice and every great student had a master teacher at some point in his/her life. These great teachers can be found in formal or informal settings. I personally don't believe we get to places in life just by matter of chance. Usually it is someone who has gone before us, traveling many places and experiencing life from many angles. And because this person has journeyed many "lands", he now provides a path for his student to tread. Typically this person not only has a lot of wisdom and knowledge, but also has a lot of life experience. But as one of my professors shared with me, a true scholar or great master is one who is able to connect with everyone they meet, no matter what that person's status is in society.

I, therefore, claim that my grandfather was a Master Toolman. Ironically, the toolbox he carried was not made of steel or hard material. His toolbox came from the heart, a heart that was soft and tender, always beating with a consistent rhythm for people like you and me.

Most great mechanics who have collected tools over several years, typically - lock their toolboxes for fear of someone stealing them. And the only way to access those tools was by having the right key. The lid, however, to my grandfather's heart never had a lock on it. It was always open to the one who was in need of a little repair.

And what about those great tools you and I were so accustomed to seeing from this Master. His tools were not made of steel; they didn't have the perfect grooves. His tools, nonetheless, were made of love, fashioned by our Father above and guaranteed for life.

Each tool had a different shape and a different size, depending on the need of that individual. One of his unique tools was his ability to use humor as a way to make a person smile, even when that person had a difficult time laughing. He always knew the right words to say, even when we did not want to hear them ourselves. He simply loved making people smile, which has been a trademark of our family since I was a child. Grandpa was also known for leaving special messages on our voice machines, just to let us know he was thinking of us. I have heard from some of you that he would sometimes call and then proceed to sing a song right over the phone. Music has a way of piercing our hearts and, although he never played an instrument or sang at Lincoln Center, he knew the power music had to calm our hearts, to make us grin, or even place a tear in our eyes.

What made this individual so special? It was his ability to connect to all of us. No matter what our circumstances may have been, he knew how to reach the very depths of our hearts, even as we hid behind layers of pain. He knew how to make us smile, especially when we needed that extra word of encouragement. When I personally went through some significant losses in my life, he would call me, put things in perspective, and then encourage me to look ahead for what God had in store for my future.

Look in this room at the many faces we see. This is only a glimpse of the many lives my grandfather touched. Unfortunately, I don't know all of you as my grandfather once did; nevertheless, if I sat down with each of you and listened to your life story, I know I would see the imprints of my grandfather's presence in your life. Therefore, we can say in some way or another, we are

family because real love transcends cultures, denominations, skin colors, or even societal distinctions.

I close with this: you can tell the greatness of man's life, not so much by his material wealth or glorious estates. On the contrary, the greatness of a man is the legacy he leaves behind. My grandfather may have never been rich with money, yet look at the numbers of people he genuinely touched and the great tools he shared with us. With that said, my grandfather was a very rich man.

Grandpa, you will never see the deposits you placed within our hearts, but I do know this: one day I will meet you again in heaven. And I won't be alone. From this day forward, many will know you from the stories and memories we have of you. And they, like myself, will thank you for being that Master Toolsman in our lives. May we pass on those tools you so freely shared with us.

I love you, Pampa.

Your grandson,

Justin J. Agoglia