

Sir Winston Churchill once said:

"Where does the family start? It starts when a young man falls in love with a girl"

That young man was John Nichols and the girl, Elaine Bird. The family that found its beginnings in the love these two shared has grown and flourished for over fifty-four years. I was privileged to become part of the Nichols family almost thirteen years ago. When I married Charlie, John and Elaine became my very own "Ma and Pa".

How lucky I am to have these special people in my life. As we show our love and pay tribute to Pa, may I share some of my thoughts and feelings.

Pa as a Young Boy

Many the time I remember Pa sharing stories about his childhood...stories of his family, his chores; what everyday life was like for him. With a boyish smile on his face, he would sometimes even confess to harmless childhood pranks and the consequences they brought. I delighted in these stories for they created a little window that allowed me to look in and see a young boy growing up in Georgia.

Pa as a Father

I did not have the opportunity to know Pa as a "young" father raising his children, but all you have to do is observe the character and integrity of his children and the way in which they live their lives and you know it was a job "well done". (I wonder if a diet of salad and pot pie had anything to do with it??)

I did have the good fortune to see him as the father of his adult children.....always showing his love and his respect for them as individuals. Always enjoying their company.. laughing, talking and sharing his wisdom, cooking on the grill, and willing to give a hug upon "hello" or "good-bye". He was a proud father!

Pa as a Grandfather

Pa loved his grandchildren and took so much pride in them. Not only was he proud of their accomplishments, whether it was learning to tie a shoe or graduating for high school or college, he was proud of them as human beings. He enjoyed spending time with his grandchildren. Taking them to the park was standard treatment. He and Jacob even waged war against bees on the patio, shooting them with a water pistol. Pa was such a wonderful Grandfather- always able to relate to each child at their particular stage in life. He would play games with them, hold them and comfort them when they had a "boo boo" (from a small scratch on their knee to a small scratch on their car). He always made them feel important and valued. Each one was special to him in their own way.

Pa as a Father-in Law

Pa was the most wonderful father-in-law one could dream of having. He always made me feel a part of the family. He respected me and supported me as the wife of his son and as a parent to his grandchildren. I loved his humor, his intelligence, his integrity and his wisdom. He showed me in many ways my value in the family and his approval of me. I knew without question that Pa loved me too.

Pa as a husband

Perhaps the greatest gift Pa left with me is his example as a loving and devoted husband and what a successful marriage looks like. Without these things, nothing else can turn out right. I remember being at the beach with Ma and Pa and hearing them talk about their younger days in Wilmington and all the good times they shared. It was apparent how much in love they were and how special those days were to them. You could see it in the glimmer in their eyes. This love was also visible everytime I was with Ma and Pa. They shared such mutual respect, admiration and devotion for each other. They were such a joy and I could tell they "delighted" in each other. What a legacy to leave to us all.

I will miss Pa's presence, his love and his example, but I will take all these gifts with me in my heart and in my mind for the rest of my life.