



***I have fought the
good fight, I have
finished the race
I have kept the faith.***

2 Timothy 4:7

THE RACE IS FINISHED

Payton's Story

*I press toward the mark for
the prize of the high calling
of God in Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 3:14

Every day a new photograph of an individual is snapped and placed into the frame of life on earth holding its spot for as long as the Great Creator chooses, then withdrawn, and the curtain falls.

Yet, even though the winter season for many has reached its conclusion, the seeds they have planted during the course of their journey will take root; causing hope for their fellowmen to begin anew. Thus, even when the sun goes down on their countenance, there will be a long afterglow that sheds light on the path others will follow.

Dear readers, as these stories of the saints come to an end, it seemed only natural to use as a benediction, the race finished by a wonderful person very close to the writer's heart; that of her earthly father, Payton.

Not only was it a life well lived, but one that demonstrated to friends and family the importance of holding to God's unchanging hand each and every day. Having lived by this principle for the majority of his life, not only was a road map created for others, but a model of humility established for internalizing the fact that life is not about any of us.

Instead, it is about falling in love with the Lord and walking with Him in the stillness, solitude, and wilderness of this time on earth fully expecting that at journey's end, He will light the first star to guide each one of us home.

Payton's Story

Having grown up along with twelve other brothers and sisters, a young man named Payton certainly knew the meaning of hard work and sharing with those in need. Certainly, his close-knit family that counted on one another for survival, did so because of the values taught by, not only the parents, but also from a loving grandmother who resided in their all too snug living quarters. In fact, each evening she was known to have sat in her old rocking chair reading the Bible to the siblings gathered around her feet.

However, in spite of the lack of finances, and no books available at home, every member of the family attended the nearby one room school and became successful adults. In order to continually strengthen reading skills and enlarge their vocabulary, the newspapers used as a covering for their walls were read at night as a group at bedtime. Folks, since it was imperative to use every resource available for survival, there simply was never anything that could be labeled as “extravagance”. However, in spite of this deficit, at reunions held later, recounting the wonderful celebrations enjoyed throughout childhood at the old home place called ‘the house in the holler” prompted much laughter and fun. From time to time, the words, “How can you miss something you have never had in your life?” were heard.

Therefore, in God’s good and perfect time, the values planted in the heart of a young Payton by his mother and grandmother came to fruition. Thus, grandmother, never missing anything with her sharp mind and vision, fastened her eyes on the all familiar gait of a young Payton approaching from across a large field one day and suddenly was prompted to break into praise and singing to the Lord. Then, as he came within earshot, she exclaimed, “Say, you look better!” This wise old gal was rejoicing because her prayers had been answered regarding the path grandson Payton would travel for the remainder of his life; that being a minister for over 60 years in God’s service.

Consequently, as a young evangelist, so poor he had neither a car nor a horse, Payton walked from one revival to another on foot. Without the finances to replace his worn shoes lacking soles, he would tie gunny sacks to his legs with twine and keep marching for the Lord. Many nights were spent under a tree with fallen leaves as his mattress. His nutritional sustenance often came from honey combs, berries and wild game. If he was lucky, a kind farmer would show mercy and invite him for a meal. Rain or shine, this servant was on fire for the Savior.

Thus, in spite of numerous physical hardships, he walked mile after mile delivering Spirit filled sermons that saved the lost; followed by baptizing services in local streams or ponds. No matter how exhausted, when this young preacher delivered messages, they were classified as that old-time religion that caused people to shout and sing praises to God without restraint; raising the rafters and shaking the ground like thunder.

Then, later when he married and three little girls made their entrance into his life, he not only served as a pastor for a local church, but also traveled the remainder of each Sunday filling in for places that lacked a minister. In addition to the usual duties, he remarkably conducted hundreds of funerals over the years held in several surrounding counties.

Folks, not only was he a wonderful father that bestowed unconditional love to his family members, but also generously gave to people everywhere. Case in point was a story relayed to his girls by a man that attended his funeral regarding a family in need that lived way off the beaten track. Receiving a call at 3:00 am that the family provider had been killed in a tractor accident, Payton immediately realized that the man’s family would be without food. Thus, he roused a local grocery store owner out of bed so he could do some shopping. The gentleman

telling the story indicated witnessing Payton approaching the family's front door with a large supply of bags full of groceries paid for out of his own meager salary.

Another special friend of his spoke of how Payton was able to finish the race set before him by his Creator due to his close relationship with God. Unbeknownst to even his own family, it was disclosed that every morning, without fail, he would journey to the woods where he would kneel beside an old familiar stump that served as an altar and spend time in communion with the Lord.

Unfortunately, this wonderful father and faithful servant of God was stricken with the ugly disease called Alzheimer's; a disfunction of the brain that resulted in him being a nursing home resident for nine years.

Folks, it was during these years that nurses reported being startled by a behavior that left them flabbergasted beyond measure. They noted that, even though Payton's mind was failing, he was able to determine the exact moment when a fellow resident on his wing was departing this earth. Then, just like clockwork, Payton would appear at the person's door offering his own pillow as a way of comforting the departing soul. You see, at this point in the winter season of his life, having always been at the bedside of others implanted in his long-term memory, the only thing he had left to give was his pillow. Can you imagine the impact on the staff members?

Then, one evening just prior to Christmas, the family members were summoned to his hospital bed with the news that Payton's earthly journey was promptly reaching its conclusion. Quickly arriving to be at his side, no family member expected to be recognized by him. After all, the disease had caused him to stop showing any signs of knowing the people he loved a long time prior to this announcement.

Then, miraculously sensing that the last child had arrive, catching everyone off guard, this loving father, Payton, suddenly opened his eyes, and studied each family member that encircled his bed. After soaking in the faces surrounding him, he then centered on each child, called her by the beginning letter of her name, sweetly followed by the word..." LOVE." (*Cah...Love*) Thus, after hearing his wife assure him that she would be fine, he peered out the window wearing a peaceful expression as his eyes took on an ethereal translucent blue color.

Hence, cognizant of this change, his family along with a wonderful nun, joined hands and sang his favorite hymn, "Amazing Grace". Ladies and gentlemen, at this moment in time, the entire room appeared to be literally overflowing with the Holy Spirit. In fact, the atmosphere was so thick with the holiness of the moment, that those left behind had the sensation of being lifted to the ceiling. Euphoric to the point of acting giddy, the surviving family members were light of heart and care free.

After this all had unfolded, Payton then bowed his own head and closed his eyes, signaling he had fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith. Halleluiah! Amen!



EPILOGUE

In the introduction of Payton's Story, the writer indicated that the glow from one's life has the ability to extend to others that have either witnessed righteous actions or have been a part of the actual events that unfolded.

Given the fact that this writer was honored to have been a child under a wonderful father's care throughout her formidable years, it seemed only right that you know the rest of the story.

After Payton had taken his last breath in the presence of his family, Sister Alice, the wonderful nun that acted as a comforter, was so filled with joy at what she had just been a part of that she proceeded to literally dance around the room, embracing each relative.

Consequently, when she enfolded this writer in her arms, she pierced her very soul with the words, "Who was this man? Who was this man? Oh, what a legacy he leaves behind." Folks, over time, the words that precious nun delivered caused the writer to go on a journey of discernment as to their meaning for her life. And...the results? Payton's youngest daughter began her career as a writer of devotionals for the elderly.

Subsequently, it was after the first collection found on devotionalembbers.com called "The Psalms of Ascent" was completed that a message was delivered to the writer in the form of a vision that occurred one Sunday morning at church.

Having penned the last word in this particular collection late Saturday night, the writer sent a prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord for being with her throughout the entire process. Then, recognizing the gift of storytelling her earthly father had handed down, the words to God that followed were, "If it be your will, is it possible for you to let my dad know about what has just happened? He would be so thrilled to realize that I, too, am fighting the good fight."

Then, on the following morning at church while sitting in the balcony looking down at the choir, the pianist began playing one of Payton's favorite songs, "I'd Rather Have Jesus". Listening intently, a vision suddenly appeared of my father sitting to the left of the pulpit just as he had in his little country church throughout my childhood. His face glowed with a heavenly light that transformed the space all around him into a beautiful radiance. Those familiar blue eyes that always danced with love indicated that, although he had once been my dad, he was now a child of God. Then, the air all around the writer's person took on the aroma of his favorite cologne.

Ladies and gentlemen, this writer was so overwhelmed that tears began to flow unabashedly down her face. Here sat a child of God, so loved by Him that he answered a prayer in such a manner that it will serve as motivation for finishing the race and keeping the faith for all eternity. Amen.

