



It's just a blue blazer . . .

. . . but it was my dad's. Last Friday would have been my dad's 90th birthday (I chose to write on Mother's Day and bananas instead). He died in January of 1996. And, as often happens when a parent dies, the children may "inherit" appropriate, still usable, clothing (assuming it fits). Well, my dad's jacket fit me then, and still does. And I wear that jacket several times a month (except during Denver's summer months).

For a the first several months (maybe the first year), it seemed kind of odd to wear this jacket, a jacket that had been my dad's. But as time passed, every time I put it on (or sometimes when I looked down and realized I was wearing it), good memories of my father would return. Memories of times together--alone and with the rest of the family, and recollections of what I learned from him. Like most parents, he taught me lots of really good things; some I remember and try to emulate (his gentleness and sense of humor, for example), and some I could never quite get (like standing up as straight as his Army training taught HIM: "Stop slouching, Gary!"). And I find that bad memories rarely arise (although, if I work at it, I can find a few back in the dusty recesses of my mind). Like Dad's classic blue blazer, the best of who he was is now a part of me.

This week, in addition to remembering my dad, I've been confronted with loss. Parents losing children. Friends losing jobs. Churches losing clergy. We've seen pictures of families losing homes to floods. Even upcoming graduations represent, in a sense, a loss: graduates will leave a campus community of which they've been a part for several years. They will miss friends and faculty, and, in turn will be missed. And all the losses are hard; all need to be grieved. There is no getting around that. Some would say that impermanence is the way of the world (and I agree), yet that doesn't negate the pain of the loss.

Faced with tragic loss, we frequently try to "make sense" of it, which usually translates into "why did this have to happen?" And rarely is there an adequate answer, for, even if there is a good answer to "why?", that which is lost is hardly ever restored. So maybe a more healing question might be "what was good about him/her, or the house, or the job?" Can those memories travel with us, continually enrich us, and be thus shared with others? Mourning is not short-circuited, but legacy ultimately is celebrated.

Scriptures (at least those from religious traditions that refer to sacred texts) often function in that way: carrying the best of the founder, now physically absent, into the future. They influence, they shape, us. They encourage us to live as the founder lived; they provide positive examples for dealing with life (well, yes, and perhaps some negative consequences, too, for not living up to the standards). They are, in some respects, like my Dad's blue blazer: constant reminders of who we might strive to be.

By the way, if you see me wearing the blazer, stop and ask. I'll tell you some of the good stories about my dad, and what, of him, I carry with me (even when not wearing the coat).

Blessings,

Gary