

Hands

His hands used to be that of a young farm boy, then a B17 pilot in WWII and then in Korea. They were hands that built basements and decks, perfected a lawn and worked as an executive in the airport industry. At a time, these hands held countless cigarettes, countless martini's, countless children and grandchildren and countless newspapers or any reading material. They are the hands that were strong and invincible like the Colonel, and now they are the hands of an older man, ninety-two, to be exact; and they are empty. Less groomed than before, less strong and less formidable. They are the hands of my father.

As we sit across from him and next to him, we are telling him of the horrible week he has had. We tell him that he got into his car and started driving. Presumably to Denny's and took a wrong turn and was gone for maybe 10 hours. There were receipts found in his pocket that showed that he had stopped a couple of times for gas, maybe even a map. We tell him that he was found in the South parking lot of the Pentagon, at midnight, after we had filed a missing person report. He had a bloody nose and there was evidence of that on his shirt and on the various used tissues that peppered his front passenger seat. When he was found by the Pentagon Police, they called the paramedics and they took him to Arlington Hospital. When Kevin and Mary Kay showed up to get him, they got the what for from the attending physician. He was not happy Daddy was out driving anything, especially a vehicle. We tell him that his family doctor also gave Mary Kay the what for, when she took you in to see him the next day. The usually calm, usually measured Dr. Filak was

furious that he was driving and has given the edict that Daddy cannot drive ever again, and that he now cannot be left alone. We tell him all of that.

The Colonel balks at the news at first. For a few moments we are twelve again as the Colonel is telling us how it is going to go down, not the other way around, but we persist. We trudge through this message we must convey to the man that was always the strongest person we knew, the most disciplined, and most methodical.

We tell this man that he can no longer drive. Ever again, in his whole life. He says "You mean to tell me that I can no longer get into my car, that is in my garage, and go fill it up with gas?" We say " No Daddy, you will never be able to drive again." He looks down at his hands, probably wondering the same thing – where did those strong hands go – why are they frail, why are they weak, why are the nail beds more blue than pink? I cannot help but look at his hands throughout this conversation. I cannot help but notice the resignation – it is in his face, and in his shoulders, as they now slump, instead of standing erect, as the Colonel was well trained to do. I want to cry. I feel weepy. I feel sad and I feel lost.

He finds his resolve and says that he would have never guessed when he was a young man flying those B-17's over Germany that one day someone would tell him he couldn't drive. He said he always hoped he would go out with his dignity intact. That was and is our hope as well – his children, it is what we want for him also. But as life has a way of making and dictating it's own plans for us, we are often times just trying to catch the ball in the end zone and pray for a Hail Mary.

We add to his distress by telling him that he had been scammed out of \$10,000. This week alone by a Culpepper Tree Gang, that prey on the elderly. They were at your

door three times this week Daddy and they came back on Saturday, hoping to round out the week with a whopping 15,000 payload. The mother lode on Acacia Lane. We hit him hard with all this news. We continue to trudge through this terrible message as well. It is like groundhog day trying to tell the Colonel what has happened and why. We don't lose our cool at the millionth time we have to answer "What day is it?" We don't lose our cool when he asks "Why are you over here so early - this is a retired household." We don't lose our cool when he is the Colonel and yells at us like we are twelve, because at that moment, we feel twelve. We don't lose our cool. Well, maybe we do, we are only human.

We tell him all of this, and the message to him, as well as to us, is so painful on every level that we can hardly hold back tears, at the sight of this great man, with all of his pride, as we tell him, you are no longer independent. You must now be babysat.

As we tell him all of this, he continues to look at his hands, as do I, and I can't help but think, where is my Dad with the strong hands?