

Growing Up with Harry: Stories of Character

Sherman Baldwin

iUniverse (September 2009)

Softcover \$14.95 (129pp)

978-1-935278-43-6

A man once told Sherman Baldwin that his father was the strongest man he ever knew. Such hyperbole is a testament to how sons see their fathers, infallible creatures of strength and wisdom. Baldwin's father passed away from Lou Gehrig's Disease in 1997; his continued strength, even while the disease was making him physically weak, inspired Baldwin to write *Growing up with Harry: Stories of Character*.

Baldwin, only five when his own grandfather and namesake passed away, realized that his three-year-old son would be too young to remember his grandfather, Harry. To immortalize his story and character, Baldwin interviewed friends and acquaintances of his father, collecting stories and anecdotes that illustrate his good nature and strong values.

Harry was a lawyer by trade and an outdoorsman by choice. His hearty, infectious laugh won over strangers and friends alike. And he was accomplished, having graduated from Yale University and served as a Marine Corps officer. Reminiscing about his childhood, Baldwin fondly remembers the bell and well house that his father insisted on installing with his own hands outside their Connecticut home. As the author writes, "These are symbols of our family—of its steadfastness, its persistence, and its timelessness."

Baldwin, who also authored *Iron Claw*, a book about his combat experience during the first Persian Gulf War, divides *Growing Up with Harry* into short chapters that center on virtues like Integrity, Value, and Humor. Each chapter ends with a pertinent quote from figures like Colin Powell and Thomas Jefferson, although these quotes would be more effective at the start of the chapters. The stories that demonstrate each virtue—like when Harry waged a smoke bomb war on a woodchuck in their garden—are endearing, but they lack the dimensionality that would make them interesting to a general reader as opposed to a descendant of Harry.

The author states that in the ten years since his father's death, "not a day goes by that I don't wish I could speak with him to ask his advice, to tell him a joke, to listen to a story, or just talk about the game the night before. Over the past decade, I have had many moments when I wondered 'What would Harry do?'" Thanks to *Growing Up with Harry*, both those who knew Harry and those who never met him will have a chance to find out. (December 22, 2009)

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