

"Writing the truth  
as I see it;  
trying not to  
offend  
those who will  
disagree."

# The truth as I see it™

Idaho Common Sense™



Craig L. Bosley, MD

## The best man I ever knew

June 21, 2009

When the call came that August day, I was working at Safeway, stocking grocery shelves to earn money for college. My dad was dead; a heart attack. The family anchor was gone.

Dad was 60, I was 19, and too young to lose my dad. I was at the age when you know the least, convinced you know the most. The age when you are pretty sure your dad is outdated, out of touch, and not too bright. The age when you cannot fathom the possibility you might be wrong.

Dad was born in 1909; 20 years old when the Great Depression hit. Although he was on his own at an age younger than most, he finished high school, got married, and got a football scholarship to Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln, Nebraska, graduating in 1936 with a wife, two sons, and a BA in history. Dad was unsure of what he wanted to do with his life. Mom asked him what he would do if he could do anything he wanted. He told her he wanted to coach "young men," his life-long reference to high school athletes.

But, the reason he wanted to coach young men might surprise you. Although he was a successful coach, the real reason he wanted to coach was to teach young men how to be men. Though I vaguely recall mom telling me this many years ago, I did not begin to

understand what dad meant by this until I moved to Pocatello in 1981.

A few years later, at a Gate City Rotary luncheon a man named Dick Fleischman came over and sat next to me. As we talked, he asked if I was from Nebraska or if I knew any Bosleys from Nebraska, specifically did I know a Cliff Bosley. When I told him that was my dad, he got tears in his eyes. He said my father was the best man he ever knew. He said my dad was his high school coach and dad taught him how to be a man.

As we continued talking, I asked him what he did for a living. There were more tears as he said he was a coach and all he ever wanted to do was coach "young men" and teach them how to be men, just like dad. I had forgotten that conversation with Dick until a few months ago when I was talking with a man in his thirties. For some reason, I told him about my dad and Dick Fleischman. He smiled as he told me Mr. Fleischman was his wrestling coach and one of the best men he ever knew. He said Mr. Fleischman taught him how to be a man.

Another generation in another state, dad's legacy continued. I wonder if dad had any idea of the profound impact he made on young men's lives. I wonder if he had any idea the extent of his success.

Dad was a poor farm boy from a large family in eastern Nebraska. He was clear in life, uncluttered by gray; there was right and wrong and no in-between. He loved his country, he loved his wife, and he loved his children. Perfectly clear.

His clarity of thought was shown during World War II when he was 35 years old with a wife and three sons. He joined the Navy, became a lieutenant senior grade, a group boat commander on the attack transport USS Hyde, and was in combat at Okinawa. His generation had the character we need more of today. It was their country. They loved their country. Their country was at war. Their country needed them. They were men. So, they went to war. That simple and that clear in their minds.

Dad lived through the war. And in 1950 I was the surprise baby, the one that should not have been. My mother got the flu and could not get over it. So, she went to the doctor, only to be told she was pregnant. She explained to the doctor that he was wrong and she could not be pregnant. She was 42; her oldest son was a junior in college, her second son a junior in high school, and her third son a third-grader. The physician was simply wrong and mom explained his error to him.

Luckily, mom was wrong, and the doctor was right. She said when she told dad, he bought her

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an overstuffed rocking chair covered with an ugly pink fabric. Fifty-nine years later that ugly pink rocking chair sits in my den, recovered in an old-fashioned, ugly pink fabric. And each morning I sit in it and drink coffee while reading the Idaho State Journal, USA Today and columns I am working on. It just feels right and seems to put life in better perspective.

The farm boy from Nebraska had a tough life and he was tough, finding it difficult to say the words, "I love you." But, even though he could not say the words, he showed me every day. At the time I could not see it; but, with the wisdom only years of living provides, I can now look back and see more clearly what he was doing.

I don't think dad ever went anywhere without me, except to work. When he had coffee with his friends, I went along. During the summers, I went with him to the swimming pool he managed and walked cornfields with him when he worked for DeKalb. And he never went hunting without me. I went everywhere he did.

Fall was pheasant hunting and dad started us in the field at a young age. I was in the field with him from age 5 on; years walking fields with no gun, years walking fields with an unloaded gun, and finally years walking fields with a single shot 410. But it was not

until I met the young man coached by Dick Fleishman that I finally understood why dad started us walking the fields so young and spending countless days in the field with him. I always thought he was teaching us how to hunt, how to be safe with guns. At 59 years of age, I finally realized that was just a bonus, like his teams winning trophies. The unending hours I spent hunting with him? He was teaching me how to be a man.

Dad must have understood that before the industrial revolution, fathers worked mainly at home. Following the industrial revolution, fathers left home for work, removing critical time they used to spend with their children. Dad somehow knew teaching children required as much time with them as possible, understanding it was hands on time that children needed from their father. So, everywhere he went, I went.

By the way, I did get to "see" my dad say, "I love you." Dad always wanted one of his sons to be the high school valedictorian. And as I finished my graduation speech, I turned just in time to see my father quietly wiping tears from his eyes. They were "I love you" tears from a proud father who could not muster the words. He died a year later.

Dad has been gone 40 of my 59 years. Since talking to that young man about Dick Fleishman and

dad's legacy, I think it's time I let dad know what I learned about him.

It's time I offer an overdue thank you for the man he was, the father he was. It's time to go home to Eaton, Colorado, this Father's Day and spend time at the cemetery with dad. It's time to catch up with him and let him know about my life. It's time to let him know I finally understand and appreciate the man he was.

It took 59 years to get to know him and it was worth the wait. He's dead; but I'm pretty sure we can still have a nice time together. Have a great day with your dad this Father's Day. I know I will. I am going to spend it with the best man I ever knew, the man who taught me how to be a man.