

IF YOU COULD SEE US NOW

An Oration

by
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Here I am, Pop, back in the same country cemetery outside Carlton, Oregon, where we said goodbye to you ten years ago.

I remember the service on that cool afternoon. I remember how strange it was that a man who was born in the days of horse and buggies was brought to rest in a baby-blue Cadillac hearse. I remember returning to the city and writing a column about you for the newspaper where I worked.

I wrote about how you were a vanishing breed: A man who held one job his entire life--farmer. A man who was married to the same woman for sixty years. A man who died in the same farm house where he had been born eighty-nine years earlier. A simple man who found meaning in tilling the earth below him, worshipping the God above him, and loving the family around him, including the granddaughter I married.

After the column was published, lots of people wrote and called to say what a wonderful man you must have been, and how they knew a Pop of their own.

But I'm afraid you wouldn't get the same warm reaction were I to write that same column today. America isn't the same country it was even ten years ago.

Much has changed, Pop. Too much.

You're not going to understand this, but you'd be considered, well, "politically incorrect" these days.

I remember a man who remained faithful to his wife, taught his children right from wrong and kept his family together despite drought and Depression. But today, Pop, amid my baby boom generation, you'd be guilty of promoting "family values," whose proponents, Hugh Downs told his "20/20" TV audience, are fueled by the same intolerance that fueled Hitler and the Klan.

I remember a man who got tears in his eyes when singing "Amazing Grace" at the tiny Baptist church he helped found in Carlton. But today, Pop, you'd be considered a fool for worshipping some obsolete God when you should be searching for your inner child, winning by intimidation, or awakening the warrior spirit within.

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