

My Dad's Hands

Calloused and scarred, dry, cracked, and darkened by nine decades of use, when I look at my dad's hands, I see:

hands, rough against the tender skin of the baby girl he carried home in September 1956,

hands with thumbs that look just like mine, forever dispelling my childhood worry that I was adopted,

hands that saluted Navy officers for thirteen years,



hands that built roads, repaired ships, swept for mines, defended our country in World War II and the Korean War,

hands that petted the dogs, fed the fish, raised the quail, stroked the bunnies, protected the love birds, finches, and pheasants,

hands that gave CPR and mouth-to-beak resuscitation to an unconscious bird, who ultimately woke up and flew away,

hands that clapped through too many mediocre halftime performances of my high

school dance and majorette teams,

hands that served as a megaphone, broadcasting encouragement from the sidelines of my softball games,

hands that held the steering wheel—tightly, no doubt—of a car filled with six or more screaming, thirteen-year-old girls, going to and from the Saturday night teen dances in Jeanerette,

hands that were always extended to help a friend and sometimes even an adversary,

hands that held on for better or worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and in health for more than sixty-three years,



hands that waved thousands of greetings to both the known and unknown,

hands that built homes—havens for hundreds of people,

hands that fashioned bowling balls, water skis, and guitars out of wood,

hands scarred by a few misses of a hammer swung thousands and thousands of times,

hands that flipped *up* the bills of hundreds of caps,

hands that set traps, raised nets, and ran trotlines as a commercial fisherman,



hands that reached out and made new friends in waiting rooms, at McDonald's, in grocery store lines, any place where there were people,

hands that loved to change television channels even as you watched an interesting show,

hands that boiled crawfish, grilled steaks, fried fish, steamed crabs,

hands that carried, lifted, hammered, measured, sawed, nailed, worked, played, created through ninety-three years of life.

The hands that did, and continued to do, all these things until Alzheimer's disease washed his memory clean, belonged to my dad, Clifton J. Charpentier, whom I have adored my entire life.



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