

Siuslaw News
P.O. Box 10
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Opinion

DEAR READERS

A candlelight remembrance vigil for the victims of Sunday's shooting at an Orlando nightclub is being held tomorrow, June 16, at 9 p.m. in the labyrinth behind St. Andrew's Church, 2135 19th St. —*Editor*



EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE

CATHERINE J. ROURKE
For the Siuslaw News

Dad

of trading fact for fiction and obituaries for fantasy. My answer echoed the financial one.

"Uh... well, there never seems to be quite enough time for the book." Time and money. Weren't they every writer's eternal lament?

"Never ever give up!" Dad declared. "Always remember your dreams and keep them alive."

A perennial optimist, Dad taught me the importance of embracing life's challenges.

"Don't ever let things get you down," he said. "Only in the darkness can a candle shine its brightest light."

That's probably how he found clever ways to support his four siblings at age 12 when his own father died in a sudden accident during the Great Depression. And how he won a Purple Heart in the Army Air Corps for rescuing his crew after their B-17 was shot down. And found time to orchestrate community fundraisers, parades, volunteer committees and charity events

Dad would also find spare change for a homeless person or family in need.

"Don't ever let things get you down. Only in the darkness can a candle shine its brightest light."

—JOE ROURKE

"If you have just one piece of bread, tear it in half and give the bigger slice to the other guy," he would say. In Dad's world, getting something back was never part of his equations.

Dad wasn't a rich man. In my eyes, he was a millionaire who bestowed to his children a mighty inheritance of wisdom,

courage and love. While he couldn't afford to give us cars or college tuition, he lavished us with far better gifts.

For me his generosity was his calm listening ear and gentle advice, or the way he mediated with teachers and boyfriends on my behalf whenever I found myself in a pickle. And there were other riches too: his collection of Celtic plaid ties that were never quite knotted right and the way he wrestled with tangled Christmas lights and home movie reels.

Such things seem trite during the course of our young lives, yet years later these nostalgic memories of our fathers become priceless family heirlooms.

From car crises to collect calls (remember those?), how do we thank our fathers for all those countless times when we just don't know what we would have done without them?

Dad's most unforgettable gift arrived in a totally unexpected way. Many years ago I found myself in between freelance assignments, down to my last dollar and too proud to call home. Then an unexpected letter appeared from Dad in my mailbox, which read: "Always keep your chin up and keep in good spirits. Expect a miracle. And never ever give up!"

Enclosed was a check for \$5,000 that he had just won by playing my birthday numbers in the lottery. Dad didn't even keep a single cent for himself.

"Never ever give up!"

Those inspiring words meant even more than the cash that accompanied them. The money is long since gone, but the real jackpot was a father's message of love and encouragement that filled my cup and heart forever.

In life's most difficult moments, I have read those wonderful words from long ago

Joe Rourke (with Catherine, age 2) supported his family as a boy during the Great Depression and won a Purple Heart in World War II.

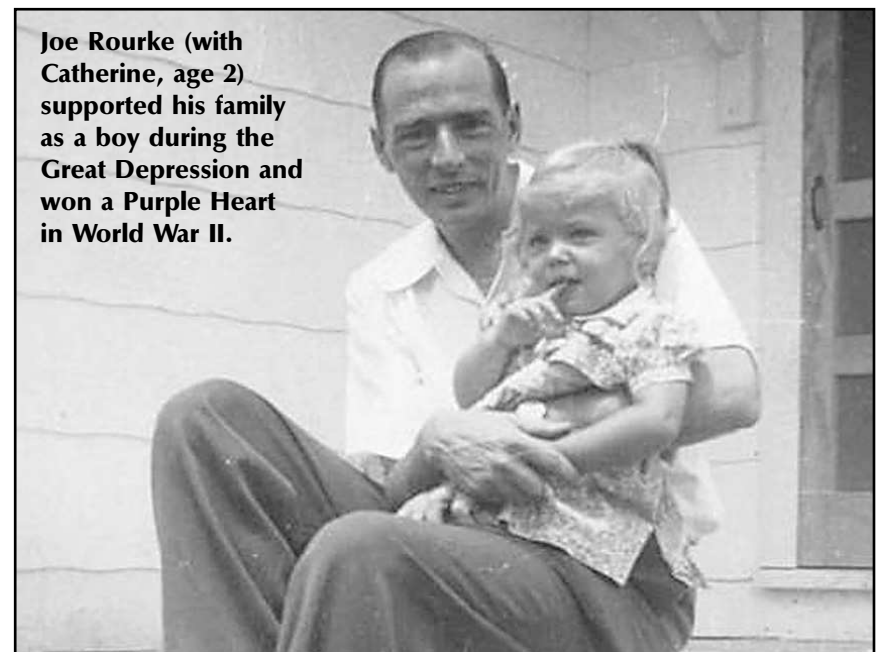


PHOTO COURTESY OF CATHERINE ROURKE

as a powerful reminder of Dad's undying love. Even though Dad and the money are but a memory, his spirit still breathes in that beautiful letter that remains my most priceless possession.

Dad loved books and newspapers, instilling in me a passion for writing and journalism. Thus it was a poignant moment when the word of his passing arrived at my newsroom desk just as we were sending another paper to press. While he lost the battle against cancer, he had won the war with his selfless devotion to family, country and community.

In a fitting tribute to his life of service, Dad was buried at Arlington National Cemetery. Struggling to pen his eulogy, I wrote: "You can take all your great heroes — your generals and your gurus, your statesmen and your saints, your popes and your prophets — and still, all dim in comparison to the humble greatness of a loving father."

The best way I can honor my dad is to live like him — fearlessly and optimistically, always striving to do the best, giving lavishly, wearing a radiant smile, lending a hand and believing in miracles.

What is the legacy your dad has bequeathed to you? This Father's Day, forget all the ties, techno-gadgets and grilling gear and celebrate the gifts he has given you. Even if you never knew him or he wasn't the world's greatest dad, perhaps you can find some hidden treasure he bestowed upon you, such as forgiveness, compassion or strength.

If he's still around, tell him how much you appreciate him. I was lucky to have that opportunity before our final farewell. A father's love never dies. If he has passed on, think of it not as the loss of a parent but as the gaining of an angel who never ceases to watch over you. Even if he did screw up now and then.

Happy Father's Day to all you wonderful dads out there. Keep your chin up and keep in good spirits. Expect a miracle. And never ever give up.

Catherine J. Rourke is an award-winning writer, journalist and book editor who teaches creative writing at the Florence Regional Arts Alliance. She may be contacted at CJReditor@gmail.com.

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All letters should be limited to about 300 words and must include the writer's full name, address and phone number for verification. Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity. Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received. Libelous and anonymous letters as well as poetry will not be published.

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