

FROM THE DIRECTOR

ANDREW BRECK / EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Where do some of your favorite pictures come from?

My grandparents have been always been a special party of my life. While growing up they were second parents and sometimes I spent more time with them than my working primary parents. I'd wake up extra early every Sunday morning and walk three houses to my grandparents to begin our weekend ritual of delivering the Star Tribune with my grandma [mind you, we had combine the papers which were printed in advance with the headlines which were delivered later – which sometimes came late Saturday evening but mostly arrived around 5:00AM on the day of delivery]. Whether rain, snow or beautiful sunrises, the best part about Sunday mornings was breakfast! Hardees or McDonalds were my options after visiting a fluctuating number of SE and NE subscribers.

In the summer my grandpa drove me around with a lawnmower in the back of his pickup chauffeuring me to my mowing engagements. He hired me when I could push a wheelbarrow with a heavy load of saturated cakey cement, and carry 8" CMUs [concrete block]. I worked with him until he wasn't able to.

He was a mason in the summer and cracked walnuts and made wood burnings in the winter... when he wasn't ice fishing on Clear Lake or at Happy Chef with a cloud of smoke around his head, while hot coffee was poured for him and the other regulars.

On my 19th birthday he gave me the most unique gift I've ever received:

It was late morning – I went up to his room and visited with him. I told him about my week but wanted to share more with him than that – there are always more important things to talk about in these moments. I sat in silence for a while and

made up a story about seeing a doe with two fawns prancing around the dappled shadows of a pink sunset whilst driving near seventy-four acres of my families' farmland we'd returned to nature.

I held his hand and told him I loved him and that it was ok to go today, then he squeezed my hand. Other than his grip, and the gurgle in his lungs, one would have glanced over his transparency; easily mistaken for a cloud of sterile white cotton sheets. He had liked driving throughout the county on gravel roads, stopping to watch and photograph birds and fowl, landscapes, sunsets and his favorite subject: deer.

I came home and had lunch – I didn't want to watch and wait. Most all of my family was at the hospital while I dined alone in the dappled shade from a deep summer day. I had promised my great-grandma someone would personally let her know. I was on my way back to the hospital when my dad phoned and informed me I didn't need to come back, so I changed course.

I didn't have to say anything. I'll never forget the primitive howl she made after opening the door and glancing into her eyes; the sound a mother makes when she loses her child – loses her first love.

Often we look back at some of the hardest moments we've rose above as some of the most valuable.

That evening we got together as a family; I opened the gift from my grandpa last: it was a wood burning he had been working on that I didn't know he had finished and personalized before passing. The image burned into the slice of wood is still as vivid as the memories now burned into my mind; when I glance at it I picture him on a winter day, looking up from his creation and smiling.

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