

## About Your Grandfather, Norbert Jacob Wilde (“Pa”)

You may think you know your grandfather, but each person has a different perspective. Since I’m his oldest child, I have a distinct vantage. I first met your grandfather when he was thirty-two years old. That was in 1951, the middle of a century that looked forward to peace after two major wars, a financial depression, and the development of weapons of unimaginable destructive power. There was a major battle zone in Korea, with no immediate resolution. (In fact, there is no resolution to this day, only an armistice.) Synthetic rubber was on the rise for automobile tires and Bakelite – an early form of plastic – was used in consumer products. There was no color TV, no Internet, no computer that would fit in your den, no cellphones, no Interstate Highway system, and automobiles broke down frequently. Air quality in industrial areas was poor. There were no integrated semiconductor chips; in fact there were no commercially available transistors. AT&T Longlines charged \$3.00 - \$5.00 per minute for phone calls anywhere in the country, a service that did not even begin until I arrived on the scene. A war hero named Eisenhower was president. People were generally optimistic but worried about a nuclear attack. If you wanted to copy a document, you would use carbon paper...it would be eight more years before the Haloid Xerox Company would introduce a plain-paper copier.

Being the first out of the chute has certain advantages. You get face time with parents before the crowd arrives. And the crowd arrived quickly. The memories reach back further for the oldest. For example, my youngest sister, Bernadette, would not remember all the times your grandfather would sit at the bedside with his father-in-law, your great grandfather, while he was sick.

At that time, your grandfather stood 6’2” and weighted 180#. His hair and eyes were brown, and his general attitude was calm. When he was with friends or family you would see him smiling quite often. You would quickly surmise that he was kind. Kindness was in his DNA.

If you lived with him as I did, you might also notice that he was patient. His patience could be scored at a heroic level. He was patient with people, but also with work and craft...with one possible exception. His life transitioned what you might call the age of steam and the modern era of gasoline powered engines and small devices. In the age of steam, if you wanted a part to obey you, you would take a hammer to it. Moving forward, that attitude became less and less relevant and effective in repairing devices. You really do not want to “force” a cellphone or DVR.

Your grandfather never was what you would call a “man of the world.” He agreed with Admiral Hyman Rickover who said “Great men talk about ideas; mediocre men talk about things; small men talk about people.” The ideas he was most concerned with were man’s relationship with God, the virtuous life, politics and greed, relationships between genders, technological progress, literature, and philosophy.

He often stated that the best things in life were free. He was not preoccupied with money as are so many men. He trusted in divine providence, that God would provide. He had taken vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The only one he ever gave up was chastity, an existential matter for you.

He came from a farming background so at noon he would listen to the farm report with Charlie Rankin, a broadcaster specialist in farming. Dad would listen to Charlie on the radio and the TV. Charlie often had guests from the Department of Agriculture and various farmers and purveyors of farm equipment. Weather

was a preoccupation for farmers, and so too for him his entire life. He had an enviable intuition about much of the natural world.

We rented a house at 2700 Beaumont in South McAllen from my Uncle Bill, William G. Walsh, until I was in about the third grade. It was a small house. Four kids slept in bunk beds before we moved to a larger house on the North side of town. We used to fall out of the top bunk and wake up startled. Dad liked to work in the yard and barbeque when he had time off. Over the years he became quite adept at the art. In about 1959 we purchased a three bedroom house on Fern Street for somewhere between \$13,000 and \$33,000, a massive sum. In this arrangement, two girls were in one bedroom and three guys in the other. There he kept up the entertaining and barbeques. For several years we did not own nor could we afford a lawn mower with an engine. We had to push a contraption with dull blades. It would jam with anything indigestible.

Your grandfather's attitude toward his kids could be appreciated when compared to other fathers. Many fathers direct and interfere in their kids' lives. They try to make their kids in their own image or attempt to fulfill their own dreams through their kids. Not so with him. He never once tried to steer us to a particular direction or field. In a sense, this left us to fend for ourselves and find what we liked on our own. He was that way about many things. There was a mutual trust. Our parents knew that we would never want to disappoint them so they did not feel the need to supervise. Dad realized that kids are made in God's image, not his.

Spankings were rare. The only event that sufficiently angered my Dad to strike me was when I was a teenager and spoke down to my Mom. I never did that again.

I did not realize what a big deal music was to him until I read a letter that he wrote to someone in the ecclesiastical hierarchy when he was in the seminary that discussed liturgical music and services in the vernacular. It was then that I realized how truly uncommon was his interest and that we had grown up with that exposure. We thought everyone was like that.

I'll never forget the first piano that we bought. Somehow Mom and Dad found out about a vertical piano that was available for \$50. So they jumped at the opportunity. I think that Uncle Bill help cart it to our house in his truck. It was really heavy. First order of business was to hire a specialist to tune the piano. That was the first I had seen a tuning fork. That piano sufficed for years and did the job to get Denise going. I played for a while but dropped off once I started playing sports in grade school.

Your grandfather learned to sail when he was in the major seminary since the Oblate seminarians would train at the Oblate Villa, a facility on the water in Port Lavaca. We joined the Oblates on some sailing excursions when Dennis Dooley, Dad's nephew and my cousin, was in the seminary. We would sail a twenty-foot yacht to an island and have a picnic and return to the Villa in the evening. Sometimes it would take a long time to return if the conditions were calm, since most of the craft had no motors. I seem to remember a boat with a motor being used to tow the one without.

Pa bought a small sailboat that we could lift to the top of our vehicle and strap down with ropes. One time the boat lifted off the vehicle and landed several yards behind us. Fortunately we were driving on a small farm-to-market roadway. There was little damage since the boat was made of fiberglass. For several years he

experimented with different venues until we settled on [Delta Lake](#) near LaSara, the small town where Pa grew up. He was quite good at sailing and wind conditions were nice for a couple of hours near sunset. Consequently, we could make the Sunfish “plane” over the water. It seems as if it would lift out of the water. That was definitely a thrill with few equals. It was addicting to Pa. Gery inherited the boat and used it on Lake Travis for some years.

Pa really liked to travel. When he joined Prudential, we would pile in the vehicle and drive to a convention. His wanderlust continued to old age.

He was really shy. After his retirement he would speak emphatically about “selling” and how important that was. I suspect one reason for that was that he had to overcome his shyness. Also, I think that his shyness accounts for his stuttering in his youth that he had to overcome.

Many of the topics that Pa was most concerned about had to do with challenges that he faced and overcame in life. He spoke about death, prepared for it, welcomed it, and now he has overcome that final challenge. He wants you to overcome your challenges. Do so as he did with joy and the help of God.

Greg Wilde

*Saturday, November 20, 2010, the day after your Pa's death*