

Johnny Beatty and Jack Olson
Letter to sons from Helen Olson

Dear Ron and Lyle,

I hope you'll excuse the fact that I am typing a note which, by the "rules", should be hand-written. I opted many years ago to let legibility overrule Emily Post. My sister Kathryn Olson Cubalo told me last week that your Dad has passed away and I wanted to pass along my condolences and my appreciation for what a fine person your Dad was.

As you must know, he and our Dad, John (Jack) Olson, carpooled for many years and over that time became very good friends. They were both enormously proud of their children, so we heard a lot at our house about all of you. I think I was about junior high age when Daddy helped your Dad file his first income tax form. That was the first year that he made enough to have tax taken out. With four, rather than seven, children, Daddy had begun paying a few years before. None of us had much money, but we were blessed with warm households and loving parents.

I told Kathryn a little carpooling story about our two Dads which she thought you would like to hear:

I think the two Johnnys started carpooling to Bessers during World War II when gasoline and tires were rationed and people were expected to carpool if at all possible. In any event, they rode to work together whenever they were on the same shift up until Daddy's death in 1964. You may remember that he was hit on US 23 at Squaw Bay by a drunk driver. As I recall, your Dad then was assigned (or asked for) the job Daddy was doing at Bessers, which was running some kind of press.

For all their close and quite loyal friendship, the two men were quite different both physically and temperamentally. Daddy was lean, fair skinned, blue eyed, quite nervous and compulsive. He flared up quickly and recovered about as fast. He liked life to be orderly and predictable. He was always not only on time, but a little ahead of time. Mother could never convince him, in fact, that if you were invited to someone's house for dinner at six, it was impolite to arrive at ten of. He liked to get to work in time to drink a cup of coffee out of this thermos and "settle in" before the whistle blew. When work was over, he like to come straight home, have dinner five minutes after he walked through the door, do the chores, and then settle down in his chair with a paper or magazine. He went to bed at 9:30 every night.

Your Dad, as you know, was shorter, stockier, dark skinned with sparkling brown eyes. He was as calm and laid back as Daddy was jittery. I don't know about his at home habits, but I do know that every once in awhile he and Daddy got fussed over the fact that it seemed perfectly reasonable to your Dad to do an errand or two in town after work.

Usually they managed to work out their irritations without any real hard feelings. But one night, things went too far. Mother began getting a little tense when Daddy was 20 minutes late. By an hour she was openly anxious, which was not at all like her. "Maybe there was an accident on 23," she said, "and traffic is tied up." Of course she pretended that she didn't think the accident was our Dads, but it wasn't hard to tell what she was thinking.

Finally, about an hour and a half after his normal time of arrival, your Dad's car pulled up and Daddy got out, slamming the car door and stomping across the lawn without looking back. He was in a rage. "That damn Johnny," he said, "this has got to stop or I'm not riding with him any more." It appears that your Dad had stopped first at the bank, then at the dry cleaners and then at the hardware store in Ossineke. Each stop was to take "just five minutes," but somehow the minutes had built up.

Daddy gobbled his dinner and stormed out to do the chores. When he was in that kind of mood, we all knew enough to leave him alone. (He was never mean to us or Mom; he just didn't want to be placated until he was ready.) He was a little calmer by the time he came in and washed up.

About eight o'clock he settled down in his easy chair with the paper. A few minutes later a car swung into the driveway and before anyone could go to the door, it opened quietly and your Dad's hat came sailing into the living room. Daddy burst out laughing. Your Dad followed the hat in. Both of them said lots of "sorry Johnny" and "it's OK Johnny". Mom made a pot of coffee and that was that. It says a lot about both of them, don't you think?

Please give my best to the rest of the family, especially Karen and husband Harold, who was a grade or two behind me in the MacDonald School.