

A Good Word for Doc  
September 9, 2014

Doc Campbell was a good guy. That's about all that needs to be said. If you knew him, you know what I'm talking about. We could use a lot of flowery words, but that wouldn't be much like Doc. He was just a good guy. Solid, all the way around. His son, Douglas, used the word "rock" over and over. I chose those words from 2 Samuel because, though they are spoken about God, they sounded a lot to me like the words a son spoke of his father: *my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer... my shield... my stronghold and my refuge...* And that's high praise.

As a father, he was always there. To support, to give advice, to teach and counsel. Always there. He disciplined in a caring way. His boys say he was always fair, and that he had a long fuse. The bite was worse than his bark, they said, because he didn't bark. He was forbearing and tolerant, until they finally crossed his line – but then they knew it. Patience is a virtue, but even Doc's patience had its limits!

The Campbell house was as loud place, I'm told. There was lots of music and dancing and friends, and Doc was the stabilizer for all that commotion. He learned to use a level in all the construction work he did, and he knew how to level things out at home, too. I guess any house that has a Judy Campbell in it, with all her love of all of life, needs a calm counterpart. You could count on Doc to be just that.

Doc and Douglas had a lot in common. They spent time in the yard and in the shed. Doc taught his son to replace a clutch, to tune a motor; his was the first instruction Douglas got in the art of construction. How many boys would love to have a dad like that? Doc knew how to do a lot of things; he was handy to have around, and he loved to be needed. If you asked him,

“Hey, could you do... (so and so)...?” He’d complain about it for days, but in a way that was like saying, “Thanks for asking!”

Doc and Layton grew closer later in life. Layton was more of his mama’s boy – and how many boys would love to have a mama like that!? But later in life, Layton and his dad had a growing affection. You can hear it when Layton talks about the father that loved him unconditionally, who accepted his coming out, even before his mother did. Fully. Completely. They say you can’t teach an old dog new tricks, but Doc Campbell proved that that is not true. Doc didn’t learn this kind of inclusion down East where he was raised, in that generation, but he called Les his son, with no hesitation, no restriction, no reserve, and it was a gift of grace to that family. And how many boys would love to have a dad like that?

Doc loved unconditionally. His sons knew it. His grandchildren certainly did. Isabell and Harrison and Sophia... you were “Papa Doc’s” pride. His friends knew his love. A daughter-in-law... a son-in-law... both knew what it meant to be taken in by his fatherly affection. Amy and I felt it as his pastors. Way back when, the girls in the church youth group called him “Teddy Bear.” That picture of Wendy Watson and Doc, that’s been on Facebook lately, tells the story. He knew how to love, appropriately, everyone who crossed his path.

I mentioned his home in Eastern, NC. He learned to do all the things boys are supposed to learn, growing up in rural NC. He learned to bait a hook, and Doc loved to fish, especially at the beach. He learned to build, and he worked countless hours on his house, and on that place on Groundhog Mountain. Her parents’ house became Doc and Judy’s special place. He cared for it exquisitely, and they talked about naming it for 40 years, but one of those quaint names, like a lot of people give to their second homes, never stuck. There was something too special about it;

no name could ever summarize all they felt for it. Doc learned how to work. And to work hard. In his career, in his shop, on Groundhog Mountain and Stokes Avenue. At 3900 Park Road. Not many people have put in any more hours here than Doc has... with Paul Ramey and Ken Kinnaird and the late George McDonald. They all knew how to work. Just about anything that had to do with the physical property at Park Road has known his touch. He was a faithful hand at the Christmas Tableau tradition, and was always here on Sunday mornings, early. Helping Paul Ramey get the lights and the AC on, and solving all the world's problems while they waited on us to arrive. In my own sons' younger years, they also got to know Doc's coaching ability. He did a lot of that over the years, with little league baseball and basketball. On Sunday mornings he could always be found throwing a ball to one of the Preachers' kids, so they, too, have known Doc's careful and steady hand.

Another thing that Doc learned from his raising, as a product of his generation, was to be proud, to keep some things to yourself. One day watching something on Oprah, he wondered, out loud, with great disgust, at why anyone would get on national television and share all their problems! While there's always that *pride*, that *goeth before the fall*... Doc's pride was mostly a good thing. He wanted to be self-sufficient, and didn't intend to bother anyone else with his problems. But it wasn't the kind of pride that got in his way. When Doc needed help... he took the help he needed.

I don't know of anyone who has ever had a bigger or better support group than Doc Campbell. The Faulkners and Johnsons, the Duncans and Steadmans, the Morrises and Floyds... what a group that was! Layton saw a picture of his dad from those early years, and he asked out loud, "When was Dad this cool?" I suspect they all were back then. They met as

young adults, and they played together and traveled together and raised their kids together, and when Doc needed a set of lungs, ten years ago, and all the support that such a surgery would require, they were there. They and a group of friends at Park Road, walked right alongside him, every step of the way. Those friend gave time and money; they prayed and visited; they prepared food and cleaned the house... Wow. How many people would love to have friends like that!? And through it all, though it may have hurt him, Doc's pride never kept him from letting those folks be the Church. As I understand what it means to be human, growing up in maturity means letting someone else in, letting someone else help... He had enough pride, that through them, he became even more solid.

I did not need to ask, but when I asked Layton and Douglas to tell me about Doc's faith, they both said, "It was solid." There was that word, again. Church was always important, but even more important than church was the faith that was beneath it. There was a quiet strength to Doc's faith. He didn't wear it on his sleeve, but you could measure it in his acceptance and love, his willingness to learn and grow and change, the pride that urged him to help – and to be helped – the faith that put a smile on his face every single day. Come what may, no matter the diagnosis – even last Sunday when the decision was made for him to come home with Hospice care, Doc smiled and told me that everything was going to be OK. He didn't say it with resignation, covering bitter disappointment; he said it like he meant it, because he did. The nephrologist asked him if he was afraid to die, and though he was not ready to go he did not hesitate: "Oh, no. Not afraid at all."

Last week, after Papa Doc joined Judy for one final, eternal dance (and wouldn't you like to see them just once more on the dance floor?), Douglas asked his children about Doc's legacy.

How will we carry on his name? What a great conversation for you all to have as a family. I hope you live out that answer, because Doc Campbell was a good guy, and we need more of them today.

May it be so!