

**SOUTH DAKOTA
FALLEN HERO**



*Your
Memory
lives on in
our hearts.*



In Loving Memory

SPC Daniel D. Bartels



Huron, SD

US Army

6-11-1983 to 10-19-2005

Iraq

In memory of my sons Daniel Dean Bartels and Douglas Doran Bartels

Three-Day Weekend ... by Del Bartels

I stand in a large field. I have been standing here since early morning. Summer has begun. School is recently out and today the nation begins celebrating with a three-day weekend.

Earlier, as I was leaving home, a neighboring couple and their children were energetically loading a camper. They were all set for the extra day of not having to work. One of the parents waved at me and asked me what I was going to do with the extra time. I said I was going to visit my son. They smiled and nodded that that was good. They then quickly volunteered everything that they were going to do. Well-meaning people sometimes ask you a question so they can eagerly tell you their answer. I guess that I don't blame them.

As I stand in the field, I eventually notice all the flowers that are appearing. I still like flowers. I can remember all the wild flowers my family found in the woods and around lakes as we hiked years ago. The flowers wave in the breeze, which feels colder than it really is.

Some people have been planning this weekend for most of the winter. I wish that I could say the same.

They talk of baseball season being in full swing – they don't catch their own joke. When I play catch with my younger children, I use a newer glove. I still own an older, dried-out glove, but it will sit and now catch nothing but dust.

People talk of summer jobs. Tourism is on most people's minds; either as participants, vendors, retailers, motel and food businesses, or a gamut of other angles of the summer trade. After all, tourism is one of South Dakota's biggest industries. Some jobs involve manual labor. Such labor is good for a person, though I feel older and weaker the last few years. Whatever the summer job, many younger people are working toward buying a car or trying to pay for next year's tuition. Watching the eagerness of high school graduates as they plan for college brings back memories for me. I try to think of other things.

More and more flowers are now in the field. The sun is now high into the sky, but for some reason everything still seems dark to me. The breeze is light and probably warm, but I shiver anyway. Everything is so green, so there is no other excuse for the dust that seems to be bothering my eyes. The field is quiet. It always is.

I believe that some towns are having parades today. I haven't watched a parade on this three-day week- end for years now.

Some people are fishing today. I once loved to fish. I still do, but it's just not quite the same any more. I must make a point to take my family out to the lake as often as possible this summer, but not this weekend. Picnics, parks, strolls, and marathon hikes will also have to wait for some other weekend. Today, I am in this field.

The breeze causes my eyes to water. A few drops roll down my cheeks and fall to the ground. More and more follow.

Tears fall from my face ... to the grave ... of my son.

Christmas Dove ... by Del Bartels

The old widower sat up in bed. Someone was downstairs. He had been praying for his son to be able to visit for Christmas. A ragged housecoat swung around his shoulders as he hurriedly shuffled to the stairs. The old dog followed, bewildered, but eager about his master.

The half-forgotten Christmas tree, drab the day before, was now decorated and shining brightly. Standing beside it was the man's son. With stumbling steps, the man rushed into his son's comforting arms. Such joy. The young man calmed his father, acting as if he had been there just yesterday, though it had been oh-so-long. The old man began talking of everything, anything, all things, that had happened over that time. He excitedly began what would be several pots of tea. Cookies were taken out of the practically empty refrigerator. The old dog lay quietly, but attentively listened to his master and hoped for some of those cookies. The entire night was spent talking, drinking tea and nibbling on a cookie or two. No neighbors were awake to see the light coming from the tiny kitchen, nor the Christmas tree flooding its many lights out of a window. The night was silent, peaceful and calm. In the house, all was right. The young man let his father go on, encouraging him to continue. All memories were full of relived details. The weight of things fell away and the old man could not be happier. He had missed his son greatly. Now he was here. The old man was ecstatic and almost sloshed water while refilling the tea pot. Yes, the dog could have a cookie or two; after all it was Christmas Eve.

There were several unopened Christmas cards absently piled on the table. A few small, wrapped packages sat there as well. The son told his father to open them. The old man actually read each card aloud. He was thrilled in displaying what was in each of the few boxes. The joy of doing such things had almost been missed this Christmas.

His son now had to go. As the old man tried to resist, something was gently pressed into his withered hands. It was a lapel pin, one fashioned into a glistening white dove. The old man hugged his son for all his worth. The young man smiled and said that he had to leave.

Snow had drifted down, blanketing the world with white. The old man shivered a bit, but his son needed no coat. One last hug. His son noiselessly walked down the street, waving back as he went. Not a mark was in the snow for as far as the old man could see. The dog sleepily peered out into the darkness. The old man would sleep well; like he had not done in ages. He loved his son so much. The visit made life worth living. He would cherish the gift from his son.

As the morning star gave way to the rising sun, the visitor was gone. Nothing disturbed the scene, save for a white bird gliding and swaying through the small town. Soon it alighted upon a carved stone. Rows of similar markers filled the field. Among the words of the inscription carved into this particular stone were "... beloved son."

Remember Him ... by Del Bartels

The leather diary's yellowed pages creak back through time to just after the Civil War. The little girl's father, Jerome I. Johnston, and her uncle, Samuel W., had been gone to the war for several years. She loved them both. When the war was over, only her father returned.

One innocent day, when she was only eight years old, she was helping mend a fence with her father. He needed to cut something, and he said a mild curse because he had left his work knife at the family cabin. She asked why he didn't use the knife sheathed at the back of his belt. "Ask your mother about it," was all he would say as they plodded over the plowed field to get a different knife. His staunch face and distracted silence reminded her of the worried and fearful evenings she witnessed as her mother and she had waited during the war.

In presumably her mother's handwriting, the diary explained the knife. "Jerome I. Johnston saw the worst of life during years of war. He was there when men – comrades and enemies – died. Even so, it was his last battle that seemed to break something inside him. Cannon had been emptied, all the bullets had been fired, and still men killed each other. Hand-to-hand is the hardest way to kill. During the fight, he and his enemy struggled, both losing their knives. In the smoke, screams and red mud, both men somehow again had knives in hand. Jerome watched the face of the other man as the knife went in. That sight now haunts him every time he shuts his eyes. He now carries that knife in remembrance, having vowed to never use it again."

As the diary filled page after page, year after year, the girl never saw her father without that sheath on his belt. It was never mentioned, being simply a part of him. She grew up; and he grew old. He aged as if something inside was taking away too many days. Even her deep love for her father could not stop the inevitable. She was barely a woman when one day he stopped living. In a sense, the long-ceased war had finally claimed Jerome I. Johnston.

The open casket resting in the country church was viewed by family, friends and a few surviving soldiers. At last, the young woman leaned over her father's body to tearfully whisper good-bye. The sheathed knife had been placed on her father's chest underneath his folded hands. She gingerly lifted it up, thinking to keep it; it embodied so much of what her father was. For the first time, she could look at it closely. She gasped. Only then did she truly understand the man she loved so much. And, she glimpsed the horror of war. Sobbing, she gently replaced the knife and sheath into her father's stiff hands. She cried ... not only for him having died, not only because she would always miss him, but she cried for him.

The sheath-side of the knife's handle had three initials carved into it. They were not J.I.J. They were S.W.J.

May both men rest in peace.

Hardest Job ... by Del Bartels

The two adults – a father and his son – walked along the lake. People were fishing, picnicking and otherwise enjoying life. No one noticed exactly when the old pickup began its creep down the slope. Its brake hadn't grabbed, and now the empty rig was gaining speed. A young child, playing at the water's edge, was unaware. Suddenly, the adult son bolted forward. It was going to be close ... without complete commitment he wouldn't get to the child in time ... it might not be enough ... he might not make it ... they both could die.

The world stood still. The father had a seeming eternity to make his own choice, yet had only a millionth of a second. He had spent his life training his son to do what was right. Yet, to save his son now, all the father had to do was reach out and grab his son's arm. There wouldn't be enough time then for his son to continue onward, to risk his own life in order to save the child. This is the moment, this is the decision, that father's fear! This is the moment a father shows his love.

A mother shows love in a different way. They cuddle, they make right the bruises and scrapes, they set the table, they freshen the pillow, they "mother" the child even when the child is an adult. Fathers though, they have what some might say is the harder job. Caring with all their heart, they have to choose to not do anything. His daughter has to go on her dates, without daddy. His son has to go on his first day of a hard job, without his dad. His child does, or does not, join the military and goes off to war. His child has to marry the right person, or the wrong person, on their own. His children have to make their own decisions, and then live with them. He has to stay out of it.

Fathers are honored on Father's Day for a lifetime of loving. They have dedicated time with their children, whether that child was born yesterday, or is already a grandparent themselves. All the loving, teaching, training and preparing a father can do for his children leads to letting his children do things on their own. Fathers spend their lives preparing to let their children go. Eighteen years go by before college will take their baby away. A split second might be all the time before the child risks their own life trying to save a stranger from a hurtling pickup.

You playing on the baseball team made your father proud. Oddly, so did the black eye you carried because you missed the ball once. You staying in detention, having fought the school bully, made him proud too. You earning a "B" on a major test, having refused the chance to cheat, made him proud. You driving over the fence post, then admitting it, also made him proud. You reading to your younger sibling, instead of doing the dishes, got you scolded, but also made him awkwardly proud. Your actions are how he knows that you love him.

Being a father means letting you make your own choices. You make decisions, while he allows you to. He still has the harder job.

Veterans' Day ... by Del Bartels

The young boy had insisted that he was old enough to understand what funerals were all about. He had also insisted on coming to the viewing before the service. It was, after all, the last time he was going to be able to see his great-grandfather.

The boy had always known that there was a gap between his father and his great-grandfather. The man who should have been there simply hadn't been. His grandfather had died before the boy was born. Only rarely had his father or great-grandfather ever talked about him in the boy's presence. An old picture standing on the shelf in their living room was of a soldier in dress uniform. He had died in a war.

The boy did not cry or fidget in his father's arms as they looked down into the casket. Later, while the father was talking to other visitors, the boy dragged a chair beside the casket so he could look more at his great-grandfather. When the father gently pulled him away so others could have their turn, the boy went along quietly. Then the questions began. Was that a uniform great-grandpa was wearing? Why was it a different color than the one in grandfather's picture? What were those things on great-grandpa's chest? What were the medals for? Were they the same as grandfather's? Do you have any?

The father felt awkward explaining such things to his young son at this time. Then he noticed that a few men were listening in, trying not to impose but unabashedly also wanting to hear. The father repeated his answers, but in greater detail for the adults as more and more people listened in. The boy stood quietly beside his father. Still listening intently, he saw that six men, all in uniform, entered and stood by the wall. One was carrying some-thing.

The funeral was probably very routine for most of the audience, but the boy was glued to every movement and every word. He was mesmerized when the six soldiers draped a flag over the casket. They looked so sad, but were so exact in their movements that the boy whispered to his dad that great-grandpa must be proud. The boy had never before heard a trumpet played all alone by itself. He stood in his chair, with his father's arm around his waist to balance him, to see better the soldier who was playing the sad song.

While people filed out to see great-grandpa's box be put in the weird station wagon, the boy asked one of the soldiers if he knew great-grandpa? Did he know his grandfather? The soldier knelt down. No, but he did know the uniforms that the boy described. The boy listened to why the soldiers were there. The soldier said it takes a special kind of person to wear the uniform and the flag like the boy's grandfather and great-grandfather. The soldier said that the boy was lucky to have had a great-grandfather and a grandfather like he did.

Everyone was watching as the boy touched the soldier's medals. He looked the soldier in the face, and everyone heard him say, "I know."