

POPPY



Weez Krawcheck

My grandfather, Poppy, was an outstanding human being in every sense. He was a leader of systematic, political change; one of the best bond lawyers in South Carolina; a champion of educational equity; an avid college of Charleston basketball fan; and, most importantly, an unconditionally loving family member, partner and friend.

I would give anything to have even one more conversation with him, but I am abundantly grateful that I had as much time with him as I did, especially since moving to Charleston five years ago. I was initially unsure about moving there, but had an interesting experience on a drive up to visit my grandparents before the move that showed me, in a roundabout way, that it was the right thing for me to do.

when I was about 45 minutes out of Charleston, one of my favorite songs at the time came on the radio - "I'm Like a Bird" by Nelly Furtado. The lyrics "I don't know where my home is, I don't know where my soul is," were resonating with me more than usual that day, as I pondered what my new Charleston life would look and feel like. I was quickly jolted back to reality, though, when a flock of small birds flew out of the trees on the I-26 median, directly into my windshield.

This was easily one of the most shocking experiences of my life, and, later, quite expensive, since we did have to replace the entire windshield. As an inherently spiritual person, I felt like this had to be a sign, but I was far too stunned and upset to decipher its meaning at that moment. When I got to my grandparents' house an hour later, I was, understandably, a little shaken, but was immediately settled by Poppy's presence, humor and spiritual insight.

Ever the optimist, Poppy flipped the script, reminding me of the song that kept him steady and positive during his cancer treatment - "Three Little Birds" by Bob Marley. To Poppy, those poor, three (or more) birds that I... bumped into... were an exorbitantly loud reminder that I shouldn't worry, because every little thing was going to be alright. Sometimes, he reminded me, change can be painful, but the process always leads to a better situation for those brave enough to go through it.

That night, my grandparents and I went to a Little Big Town concert at the Gaillard Center, and we had the absolute best time. I was reminded of Charleston's beauty and cultural vibrance, as well as how much I love being around my grandparents. They held hands for the entirety of the concert, and I felt overwhelmed with gratitude for having such a beautiful example of unconditional, reciprocal love in my life.

As everyone left the venue after the final encore, "Three Little Birds" started playing over the speakers. I immediately looked to Poppy and he was immediately staring at me, with his signature, mischievous side smile that we all know and love.

sometimes there's this sense of belonging that blossoms in your chest, overflowing into a sense of calm assurance that you're right where you're supposed to be.

We've all experienced it in some way or another, colored in different ways, perhaps, but always the same in substance — the feeling of home.

In that moment, I knew Charleston was home because my heart was with my grandparents, from whom love flows abundantly, outwardly, in all directions.

Poppy was one of the most spiritual people I know, and I'm very grateful that I've inherited this trait from him. He was already sending each of us unique, spiritual signs while he was here, and I know he will continue doing that from wherever he is now. We'll hear him in songs and church bells, see him written as a message in the sand or within the lines of a comforting book, or maybe feel his presence on the Sullivan's Island sea breeze.

I know it will be different for all of us, and I'm doing my best to find some solace in these symbols as they reveal themselves to me. I was able to find some comfort in watching my grandfather's interviews about his part about the passing of the Education Improvement Act. Poppy knew that access to education was key to personal development, and he worked tirelessly throughout his life to enhance educational equity throughout the state of South Carolina.

Poppy said the institution of the EIA was the most important contribution that he made throughout the course of his professional life, and the vibrancy and thoughtfulness with which he answered these questions showed just how proud he was of this achievement. Poppy was incredibly humble, and rarely talked about his career with my sister and I, so I know we are only starting to learn about the true impact he made through his work.

In the interviews, Poppy's depth of knowledge on structural racism and its interconnectedness to educational equity, as well as his understanding that there were distinctive limits on his personal perception of these issues, shone through. It is clear to me that Poppy's self-awareness paired with his advanced understanding of underlying societal structures was instrumental in elevating the impact that the EIA had in South Carolina.

So much of these interviews stuck with me, and made me even more proud than I already was to call Bill Youngblood my grandfather. There were, however, a couple of moments that truly pierced me through the heart. I wanted to end my time by sharing the most poignant ones with all of you.

The first is on Poppy's thoughts on how to live a good life:

"There are times in your life when you will be responsible for outcomes, and that's a wonderful opportunity. However, you're not in control of outcomes — you're going to do the best you can with the skills you have, and then you'll develop equanimity. You will not let yourself get too high or too low, and you'll approach everything with the same mindful, calm, non-judgmental response. There is some deep excitement about moving in the world in that way, and so much of that begins with education."

And, lastly, the definition
of true wisdom that
Poppy distilled throughout
his life:

"Wisdom is the ability to
see deeply into cause and
effect, to see the inter-
connections among things,
and, hardest of all, to see
things as they really are,
not as we would have
them be, knowing full well
that the thing we seek to
see more clearly is
itself constantly changing."

I hope that we all choose to approach life with the curiosity, clarity and presence that Poppy brought to each and everyone of his interactions. That we stay unattached to outcomes, but obstinately confident in our ability to rise to each challenge life throws our way. That we develop our own sense of wisdom to accept the world as it is, but never stop trying to improve it. And, most importantly, that we love everyone vehemently and, unconditionally, without expectations or fear, because, as Poppy said, every little thing is going to be alright.