

Time cannot tarnish what the heart keeps in love



The memory of Edward Page (Ned) Landers, who died in the early 70s, rarely surfaces in Blackstone now. Twenty-three years have passed since he served as a state police sergeant and sheriff here.

But from 1947-60 and 1967-71, Blackstone residents always felt the strong presence of Sergeant Landers. The town was shocked when his superior found fault with his performance, and returned him to traffic duty, demoted and dishonored, after 13 years as sergeant.

Blackstone rose as one voice to keep him from being transferred to Northern Virginia, but the town's pleading was in vain.

His daughter, Page Carr, is still mystified as to exactly why her father's career was ruined just before his retirement. "It had started in Harrisonburg before he came to Blackstone over just a little disagreement. Daddy had

apparently stepped on toes and wasn't even aware that he did it," she said.

But it was how he walked through life that she remembered when his deputy's revolver was returned to her by the daughter of the late Jesse Powell, who had been Sheriff following Landers. Mounted in a protective case, the gun arrived while Page was still unpacking boxes in her "dream home," just purchased in beautiful Amherst County. The spirit of her father seemed to be saying: "I am here. You are protected."

It was like he had just walked through the door. She said down and nourished herself with the memories this opportunity released: "Daddy always said a gun should never leave its holster unless you're prepared to kill. He said he had never taken his gun out but twice in all the years he worked. He preferred to talk his way out of it, and he was a great talker."

Unfolding memories sketched the features of his character: "One of his favorite police tales involved a call he got from Prince Edward County about three armed bank robbers headed east on 360. When he met them on the road, he turned the car around and

followed them, reaching for his shotgun with one hand as the chase accelerated. He rant them up a side road, blocking them in, and held them under the shotgun as he radioed for help.” Page can’t think about courage without thinking of her father.

To Landers, Northern Virginia was like an exile. “He hated it up there,” Page said. “But if he was bitter, he didn’t show it. He took it with dignity, of which he had plenty. He fought it, but when he couldn’t win, he accepted it.”

Even in his fall, Landers stood tall. If this was a test for his character, he passed. His successful walk through fire probably helped elect him Sheriff when he retired. Had it not been for his health, he would have been elected for a second term. But his heart had given out at the age of 67.

Sergeant Landers loved the law. People said he was the only policeman who could give you a ticket and make you feel good about it. And he felt the law should not be without humor. One time he stopped a car that had one man steering the car and another man changing the gears. Landers charged one with no operator’s license and drunk driving and the other with no operator’s license and reckless driving.

When he was hospitalized for his heart condition, a lady—who had spent considerable time in jail thanks to Landers—made him an afghan. Page keeps that afghan on her sofa, where it reminds her of the respect even the most unlikely people had for her father.

Everything he left her testifies of his strength, even in fear: “He was one of the first trooper to ride motorcycles. He hated it, said it was the only thing he was afraid of.” She still has his boot jack by the fire place, which he used to get off his hated motorcycle boots.

Her most valuable possession is the ring he used to wear. “This ring was his daddy’s,” she said, pointing to the Greek god on it. “He wore that all his life. When he and his brother were teenagers, they were climbing a water tower. Daddy slipped, and the ring caught on a nail and kept him from falling.” The ring helps her touch that little girl inside who was lifted high by her father—who to a child is like a god—and felt the trust from which her own character could grow. God would never let his little girl fall.

Page learned when she looked back on her father from adulthood that he was a self-made man: “He never attended school because of some medical problems. But his mother was a teacher and taught him at home. He became well educated on his own and devoured books. I remember his terrific vocabulary.”

And the first bright burst of pride she had for her father came when he spoke about safety to her girl scout troop. “I was so proud of him, then,” she said, standing there in his uniform.

But being a state trooper’s daughter also has its embarrassing moments: “I was out at Camp Pickett airport looking at the stars, shoes off, feet on dash board, listening to music with my date—thinking we were totally alone. A car pulled up, and a flashlight beamed into the car, accompanied by a familiar voice: “Page, don’t you think it’s time to go home, now?” We never talked about it; but I sure was mortified.”

It wasn’t until she was grown that she realized how much pain her parents bore that they never showed. They had six children who died from birth defects—only Page lived. “I had to learn from relatives how devastated Daddy was when his last son died.”

In memory of her father, Page has always known where to find the face of integrity and dignity. His strength of character still lifts her up. And when temptation

offers an easy way out, his voice will suddenly come out of the shadows: “Page, don’t you think it’s time to go home.”

“Yes, Daddy, I am home,” she whispered as she hung the gun on the wall next to the mantle where she could always see it.

In life, Landers may have felt he had been dishonored, but in his daughter’s heart and in the memory of the town he served, his shield still shines in the sun.



Piece Returns

(Photo by Ed Conley)