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My Pal
By Chrisann Bandy

When I was growing up, my father was never in the picture. It was only my mom, my sister and I, with the support of our grandparents. Later in my childhood, our stepdad, Brandon, came into the picture. I always remember my sister and I being sent to Granny's and she would ask, "You girls ready for some hot tea and honey toast?" Granny made the best homemade bread. Trips to Granny's house was always an adventure. While it was awesome to cook up a meal or spend the day in the kitchen making special memories to last a lifetime, hanging out with my Pal had to be the greatest.

While I ate my honey toast and drank my hot tea, Pal started putting on his boots. "You ready to work?" he asked, and I replied with a yep. "Then go get your overalls on," he instructed, and I did just that. My pal owned his own little business called Brandel Oilfield Service. He owned about 20 light towers; they supplied light to events, parties, but mostly for the oilfield for locations. Pal was a hardworking man and always could rely on what he called "his little worker." I was in charge of changing the "Red Stuff," putting new filters on, and refilling the oil bottles. I got paid in money, cookies and peanuts. Bribery also worked, depending on the bribe, of course.

After a long day of exhausting work, it was time to feed the cows. Next thing you'd know, we were both yelping and a hollering "Suewewweee," the feeding call. We'd sit there and count the cows as they stomped in to make sure they were all there. Gypsy, Bambi, Lighting, Longhorn, Rosebud, and Red.

"Yep, they are all here," I'd yell. We threw the feed into the feeder and stepped away before we get trampled on.

"They are more afraid of you then you are of them," he'd say every time I seem to be skittish.

We got back to Granny's house to eat our supper. Pal said a prayer before we dug into the delicious mashed potatoes, chicken, cooked carrots and a tall glass of milk with a few cubes of ice. Although I did not like cooked carrots, if Pal ate them, I ate them. After dinner it was time for desert, so we scooped up a big bowl of chocolate almond ice cream. We'd go sit in Pal's old Lazy Boy; with me sitting in my spot on his lap, we sit and eat our ice cream.

Another day at Granny's house and we had to put hay bales out in the pasture. My sister was driving the truck while Pal and I cut and tossed the hay bales off the top. Standing on the top of the hay bales, we are about two stories high. I don't know what happened next besides waking up on the ground on top of my pal asking, "Pal, are we in heaven?"

"I don't think so." Somehow, somehow, we had fallen off the hay bales and in the mix of it all my pal had pulled me on top of him so he wouldn't squash me.

What will we do tomorrow? Will we build another play house, ride the mower like it's a toy, or go out and climb the old willow tree and play with the cow? No, none of those this time. My sister and I grabbed our towels, walked outside in our bathing suits, thinking we were the coolest girls in town. We went down to the creek with Pal and swam. As he watched us goof off and make a mess of ourselves, he stood up firm and yelled "Stop!" We froze and just looked at him.

"Don't move," he said very quietly, "There is a snake heading right for you" (Continued on page 5)
girls. He should have known better than to tell me that! Up I jumped and sprinted as fast as I could, and he captured me in his arms. It didn’t take long for my sister to follow. Oh boy, did we have a laugh.

April 17, 2006, was officially the worst day of my life. I was getting a midnight snack when the house phone rang. I looked at the caller ID and it showed up “Pal Craig.” I thought to myself, “Well, this is odd.” I answer with a hello, but it wasn’t a voice I recognized.

“Is this Jennifer Thomas?” The man on the other side of the phone asked. Immediately, I knew something was wrong, so I woke my mom up. I could hear my mom in the other room, telling my stepdad she had to leave and go get Granny. As I stood there and watched my mother grab for her keys, she looked at me.

“Pal has been in a bad wreck, and I need to go get Granny and go to the hospital.”

“Please let me go!” I begged and pleaded. The answer was no, and from there I knew it was bad. I lay in bed and tried to rest my eyes, my mind is wandering. How could this of happened? I closed my watery eyes and prayed. I prayed harder than I had in a long time: “Please, God, don’t take my Pal. At that moment Brandon stepped into my room and told me to get dressed, we were going to Granny’s.

I waited by the front door for mom and Granny to arrive. I saw the car pull up and I didn’t know what to think. The moment they stepped out of the car, I knew, I just knew my Pal was gone. I balled my eyes and soul out. I had lost my best friend, my role model, my adventure buddy, my boss, I had lost my pal. It felt like everything had been pulled from under me in a split second. I didn’t understand what was going on. I didn’t understand why. Why did you take my pal? That night I slept in our old Lazy Boy, ate some chocolate almond ice cream and covered up with his blanket. I cried myself to sleep listening to my mom and Granny call family and friends to let them know Pal went to be with the Lord.

The business that he started from nothing with his little helper, now called B&M Power Up, was sold to my Granny’s ex-husband, my mother’s dad, Mike Bandy. He still has the business, and it has grown to be a big success in Oklahoma.

Pal is my motivation in life. I still have that old ragged Lazy Boy sitting in my own house. It still smells like his shampoo from when he would sit there with wet hair after a shower. When I’m having a bad day, I go and sniff, and I know he is there with me. We must treasure the moments we have with people, make the best of memories, and laugh as much as we can, because we never know when that last laugh will be.