

I remember a favorite recipe submitted by my father-in-law years ago for the family cookbook. The recipe's title: "Soggy Tomato Sandwiches." The necessary ingredients: "Two slices of bread each covered with Duke's mayonnaise, a vine-ripened tomato sliced thick, salt and pepper, a plastic sandwich bag, a refrigerator, and a kitchen sink." The instructions: "Combine the bread, tomato and seasonings. Place in sandwich bag and then in refrigerator. After several hours, take out sandwich bag; stand over the kitchen sink; enjoy."

My father loved tomatoes too. In the spring, he would give us five-gallon buckets with a tomato plant in each one. "Take these home with you," he would say. "Water them and keep them on the side of the house that gets the morning sun. I have mixed cow manure with the dirt, so they will not need fertilizing." Later in the summer, he would remind us plants like water. Eventually he would share his tomatoes with us, having given up on our horticultural skills.

I remember my father sitting at the kitchen table eating a tomato, carefully picking out the seeds and placing them on a napkin. "What are you doing?" we asked. "This tomato is so good," he said, "I thought I would save some seed to plant in the spring." My Dad would die a few days later, but he had set an example for us to never stop living and to always look to the future. He had survived so much in his life. His father died while he was young, he had polio as a child and walked with a limp his entire life, and he spent the early years of his marriage serving in WWII in Hawaii with the Army Air Corps. After the war, he came back to Charlotte and built his own business. Through it all, he never stopped believing in tomorrow.

My father-in-law, Kirk Neely, and my father, Ray Suddreth, taught me much, including to believe in tomorrow and to savor the simple things in life, for they are the greatest gifts. I thank God for these two men and how they taught me to treasure life.

May God bless your Father's Day this month, and may God's grace come to you in simple ways this summer, like a good and soggy tomato sandwich.

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