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Grandpa's Knife

By Gary E. Anderson

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by: **Gary E. Anderson**

From the book Spider's Big Catch
Gary Anderson

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Sometimes, when I'm stressed or feel the need to refocus, I find myself thinking about my grandpa's knife. There are people in the world who drink or take pills in an attempt to manage stress, and some folks handle their rosary beads.

My grandpa whittled.

My brothers and I could always tell when there was something weighing on Grandpa's mind. He'd pick up several short sticks, sit on the porch swing, and begin to whittle. We could judge the size of the problem he was grappling with by the size of the pile of shavings at the old man's feet.

As far as I knew, he never whittled anything useful. That was never his purpose. He just took any old stick and began whittling it into a point. Then he'd keep whittling until the stick was too short for him to hold, set it down, and start on another one. I marveled at his ability to focus so intensely, just sitting there, gently rocking the porch swing, quietly whittling a problem down to size. Then, as if being guided by some inner signal known only to him, we'd see Grandpa suddenly stand up, and we knew he'd reached a decision. He'd pick up a small whisk broom that always stood beside the swing, clean up the shavings, and walk away in silence.

There were also times when Grandpa's knife helped teach us other lessons—lessons that were more difficult to face. No matter what our indiscretion may have been, we boys knew that there would come a time after we'd received our punishment when Grandpa would call us to come and sit with him on the porch steps. Holding several sticks in his left hand, he'd reach into his overalls with his right hand and

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pull out his old knife. Then he'd sit on the swing and begin to whittle, slowly and deliberately, never looking at us, never saying a word.

Finally, after what seemed a very long time, he'd begin to talk, softly but firmly, about whatever it was we'd done, why it was wrong, and how disappointed he was that we were having to have this talk. All the while, thin slivers of wood gently floated to the floor as his knife deftly cut into the stick he was whittling.

By keeping his eyes fixed on his whittling, Grandpa made certain he never saw the tears rolling down our faces as the consequences of our actions washed over us. He never tried to drive home any big point. He always spoke in gentle tones and when he was finished, he stood, snapped his old knife shut, put it back in his pocket, and turned to walk away, never quite looking at us directly.

"Clean up the shavings, will you, boys?" he'd say as he slowly walked off the porch. The lesson had been learned, and there was nothing left to say.

You know, people don't seem to whittle like they used to, at least, not the way Grandpa used to, or for the same reasons. I don't even carry a knife, and neither do most folks I know. But there are times when I'm working at the lathe in my shop—when a long piece of wood curls up from the knife and floats down to the floor—when I'm suddenly eight years old again, watching my grandpa sitting on the porch swing, whittling.

I reach down, pick up the shaving and watch it curl around my finger. Then I just stand for a long moment, remembering, until a thought crosses my mind. Maybe I will get myself a small pocket knife, after all. You never know when the urge to whittle might overtake me.

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Gary Anderson is a freelance writer, editor, ghostwriter, and manuscript analyst, living on a small Iowa farm. He's published more than 500 articles and four books. He's also ghosted a dozen books, edited more than 30 full-length manuscripts, produced seven newsletters, and has done more than 800 manuscript reviews for various publishers around the nation. If you need writing or editing help, visit Gary's website at

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Pocket Knives: How To Choose The Right One For You

By Gabriel Adams

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Pocket knives are convenient tools that can come in handy for most anyone. Men and women alike can benefit from the convenience of having a pocket knife. They are useful for occasional use and for emergencies. If you are an avid camper or traveler, a pocket knife that has multiple uses can be especially convenient. When faced with an emergency situation, the pocket knife can be used to saw wood, kill fish and prepare meals. For convenience, you can have a handy bottle opener and corkscrew which may not be readily available in all situations.

How to choose the right pocket knife will depend on your needs. If you want something to carry around with you at all times, a smaller, multipurpose pocket knife might be best. For professionals, a nice engraved pocket knife that has a knife and possibly a few other tools will be perfect. They can be purchased at home improvement stores, accessory stores and knife stores. Executive pocket knives can fit into a purse or briefcase easily and look elegant as well. They retail between ten and fifty dollars and can be personalized as well.

For more practical knives, such as a kind you may keep in your automobile or for use on camping trips, go for the multi tool pocket knives. The Swiss Army knives are the most popular and there are a variety of sizes available. These tools range from approximately thirty dollars to two hundred dollars. There are multiple tools that will go with them such as different sized blades, nail file, scissors, saw, corkscrew, screwdriver, can opener, toothpick, tweezers and magnifying glass among other options. The multi tool pocket knives are a little thicker than smaller knives but they still are small enough to fit into a pocket, purse, briefcase or backpack. Choose the pocket knife that is best for you by considering use and price.

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