

BY JEFF WINTON

How often do you take a step back to consider the influences that helped shape your beliefs, ethics, and character?

Having grown up on a small family dairy farm in the Chautauqua region of Upstate New York, I had a limited worldview until my freshman year at Cornell University. That experience opened my eyes to a diversity of ideas and endless opportunities that were new to this farm boy. However, the lessons I learned from my dad, Archie Winton, had the most impact on the person I have become.

A LITTLE BACKGROUND

My dad was born during the Great Depression. He was thrust into playing a key role in our family-owned farm from an early age when his father, my grandfather Floyd Winton, suffered from the devastating impact of polio. Although my dad had two sisters, in those days it was uncommon for women to go into farming. He eventually took over the operation and forfeited any dreams of college to keep the generations-old business afloat.

Dad grew up with limited resources, and his focus was always on making a better life for his family. In addition to starting work before sunrise, he would break after a few hours to go to his second job as a school bus driver. Then he would return to his farm duties until he had to drive the bus again at the end of the school day. Even then, his workday was far from over. He would grab a quick bite, change back into his farm clothes, and do whatever still needed to get done that day, often not getting to bed until midnight at certain times of the year. And then he would do it all again at 4:30 a.m. His one reprieve came on the weekends when there was no school bus to interrupt his farm chores.

WORKING SIDE BY SIDE

I was the oldest of four brothers, and started helping on the farm from the age of four. Of course, I wasn't much help initially, but I was excited to do my part. My first job was feeding and watering the baby calves. As the years passed,

my responsibilities grew. Working side-by-side with my dad was how we bonded. Keep in mind the farm was a 24/7 business. There were no vacations. No extended weekends off. No fishing trips. The only "day off" occurred when we showed our animals at the County and State Fairs.

Watching my dad in action was a revelation. In addition to his work ethic, he was a community leader, frequently speaking out to support the underdog and causes he considered to be important, even if unpopular. When Mother Nature was unkind and caused financial hardship to our farm and those of our neighbors, my father, never flinching, would be the cheerleader the community needed.

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HONORING DAD'S LEGACY

The only time I ever saw my dad cry was when he lost both his parents within days of each other. My dad died in his 60s the same way

my grandfather did – from cardiovascular disease. Although my dad was retired and spent winters in Florida with my mom, he was on the farm that day lending a hand before he had a fatal heart attack. Today, cardiovascular health is one of the therapeutic areas of focus for some of the clients of Jeff Winton and Associates, the communications agency my partner, Jim Modica, and I launched on February 2, 2020. My dad was born on February 2, so our agency's anniversary honors Archie Winton, whose sacrifices made my career possible.

Of the many gifts my dad bestowed on me, these three have become part of my DNA.

1. A STRONG WORK ETHIC

To this day, I have never met anyone who worked harder or with a greater sense of purpose than my dad. His work ethic inspired me to excel in college and go the extra mile on every job I have ever held. I developed the ability to multitask, a skill that dad had conquered of necessity. The desire to do more than expected has always served me well. Interestingly, I once had a boss who said she preferred

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My father, Archie Winton, driving his tractor with my grandfather, Floyd Winton, in the wagon.

Father/Son *(Continued from page 16)*

to hire people who grew up on farms because of their unparalleled work ethic.

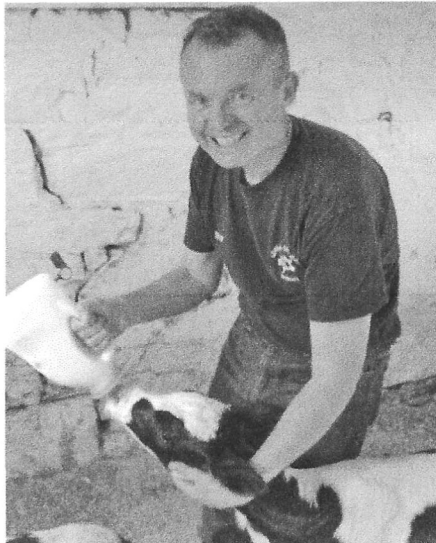
2. A PHILANTHROPIC COMMITMENT

Like my dad, I am a relentless advocate for the disenfranchised or for causes that I feel are important. I believe we each have a duty to help others whenever possible, whether through volunteering or contributing resources. I often wonder how my dad fit the time into his 24/7 schedule to be a force for good in the community. If he could find a way, most of us should be able to carve a niche for charitable work. Having seen the emotional and mental strain of farming firsthand, especially when my 28-year-old nephew died by suicide, I started a nonprofit organization last year called Rural Minds (www.ruralminds.org).

We aim to end the suffering, silence, and stigma around mental illness in rural America.

3. A LIFELONG LOVE OF ANIMALS

Working and living on a dairy farm, the animals were an important part of our family and our existence. My dad taught us to treat animals with respect and kindness, and



Jeff Winton feeding a calf.

that we should always feed them before we ate our meals. He was a lifelong lover of horses, and I always enjoyed watching him train and ride these majestic animals. Today, I own several horses and compete in equestrian events. Dogs were also a big part of my childhood, and I started showing our dogs when just a young boy. I still have many show dogs that have competed at the highest levels, including at the prestigious Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show and the National Dog Show.

There is no doubt I am the product of my father's values and how he lived his life. I consider it a privilege to carry on his legacy and, hopefully, make a positive impact that would make him proud.



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