My Hero-Barbara D. Parks-Lee-District of Columbia State Organization

How I remember standing beside Granddaddy that day. I was about two and a half or three when we posed. He lifted me to the bench, but I was just able to touch his shoulder. My pink dress, butterfly bow, white anklets, and high-top, freshly polished shoes made me feel so special.

I remember him standing ramrod, WWI soldier straight. He had on dress khakis, creased razor-sharp, a white shirt with arm garters, and one of his ever-present ties. His fedora was unusual, for he never wore his hat in a building. However, that day it was special. He wanted to appear my serious protector.

When the photographer said, "Smile; why are you looking so stern?" Granddaddy said he was in a serious mood, thinking about how he could make the world a safe place for my sisters and me to be able to smile.

He had been in WWI, and he endured the systemic racism aimed at servicemen of color in uniform when the war ended.

One of the few times I can remember him smiling was when he came in with lemon sherbet ice cream he shared with his beloved wife, my Grandma Ella. Every now and then, when he thought no one was looking, he'd sneak a kiss or a pat on her behind. She loved him as much as he loved us. I was spoiled, encouraged, and always happy to be around him.

When we left the photography studio, he said, "Let's get some ice cream, but don't tell your Mama. She'd have a fit trying to get ice cream out of your dress before church tomorrow. We left, me holding his hand, and got into his robin's egg blue 1939 Dodge. ™ He opened the hood vent but not the windows, because I was afraid of bugs getting in.

He only lived to the age of 52, but for all the time I knew him, I felt loved, affirmed, and encouraged, knowing I could make him smile when he told me of his childhood in rural South Hill, Virginia.

Yes, that picture brings back the smell of his Old Spice™ shaving cream, how strong he felt as I held onto his shoulder, and how blessed I am now to have had him in my life.