



Text Version of Audio Story: Peanut

You know, years ago when I first started writing, I wrote his story. I titled the story “The Funniest Man in McAlisterville.” I never mentioned his name in the story. Simply by the title, everyone from my hometown knew who I was talking about. The most amazing thing about the funniest man in McAlisterville was his obituary.

He had been a highly decorated World War II hero who had never uttered a word about his medals or honors or his experiences during the war. He was one of my dad’s best friends for 50 years. And even as my dad read his obituary, his jaw dropped as he learned that his drinking and fishing buddy, his confidant for all those decades, had never even alluded to his time as a soldier. Of course, everyone knew he had been a soldier simply by default, because of his age. Ninety-nine percent of the guys his age and my dad’s age had been soldiers in the Big One.

He was my friend, too. Every human being who ever met him surely thought of him as a friend. Not only was he the funniest man in McAlisterville, he was the most likeable, for if no other reason than he liked everyone he met. I guess its okay to use his name now, because he has been gone a good ten years. His name was Eugene Landis. All of his friends referred to him by his nickname, Peanut.

Just the other day, someone mentioned his name, and I broke into raucous, uncontrollable laughter. Remembering him makes me laugh, and he would love that fact. I knew right then, as I was trying to catch my breath, that I had to tell my listeners more about Peanut. He got his nickname because he loved eating roasted peanuts. Take the five funniest comedians you’ve ever listened to, put them all together, and then take that times ten, that’s how funny Peanut was.

Peanut has become one of the great influences of my life, not only because he was my dad’s good pal or because he could, with just the turn of a phrase, make me laugh harder than anyone has ever made me laugh, but because now — knowing what I know about his life — he has given me one of the most valuable tools for living that one could ever possess. As an adult, I now realize who Eugene “Peanut” Landis was. At the end of the day, he was just that. He was a guy who made it to the end of another day, and that was his number one priority, and he used humor to get there.

I did a little research into his military service, and what he had been through and what he had seen was unspeakable. And, in the face of that horror and terror, he found the courage to rise up and face it head-on. Then, he had to come home and live every day with the memories. I think of him daily, not for being hailed as a hero, but his day-to-day life afterward, in McAlisterville, and how difficult it must have been for him — on some of those days — just to get to the end of the day. We all have tough days, especially if we have to remember something we wish never happened, or would have happened differently. I have those days more often than I care to admit. But, you know, they've gotten easier since I've come to understand an old friend and how he did it ... how he laughed his way to the end of the day. I don't have kids, and I don't want to sound preachy. But, if I did, the one piece of advice I'd give them is to never trade in your sense of humor for anything because, at the end of the day, you might need it to get there.

From somewhere behind the radio with the music of Johnny X, I'm the American Storyteller.