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Bio of John H. Spotts

The character of a man is expressed in what he does and the results that are derived from those actions. Hopefully, the following sentences, paragraphs and stories will reveal the essential character of "John Henry" as Agnes, his loving wife of fifty plus years, called him.

John was first and foremost a family man, fearless, creative, resourceful and supremely confident. He never expressed self doubt, displayed anger publicly or spoke to anyone in a harsh manner. He was indeed a kind and gentle soul.

An examination of his youth may explain the afore-mentioned character traits. It is said the metal of a man is formed in the crucible of the trials and tribulations that he faces daily. John Henry's struggle began early. He was born April 7, 1920, the son of Mabel and Eugene Spotts in Roncverte WVA. He was raised in an area known as Brussha Ridge. It was considered the backwoods of the state and it appears that life was challenging at best. If you can, try to imagine farming on the side of a mountain. Try to imagine plowing the land, feeding farm animals, canning food for the winter and fetching water daily for bathing and drinking. Hard times and tough work, indeed, describes the first sixteen years of his life.

In addition to the daily trials of farm life, you should know that during his youth, the depression era was in full bloom, thereby, creating further hardship. And if that was not enough, John Henry's father died. The horrible and tragic death of his father, denied the family of five siblings and his mother, the only source of financial support. John being the eldest, had to seek work to support the family. At age sixteen, he worked at various farms as a day laborer. Two years later, he left home and joined a CCC Camp (civilian conservation camp) in Berwind WVA for the very purpose alluded to earlier. As described by information gathered from the internet: "the CCC Camps enrolled mostly young, unskilled and unemployed men between the ages of 18 and 25. The men came from families on government assistance. Men enlisted for a minimum of six months. Each worker received \$30 dollars in payment per month for his services in addition to room and board." Twenty-two dollars of their pay was sent to

their homes to support their families. The worker was allow to keep eight dollars. The thirty dollars he earned has the same purchasing power as \$535.36 in today's currency. Given the economic times and the conditions of his family, this sum of money was considered a fortune.

Finally, his entry into the CCC Camp initiated a second phase of his adult life. He grew to full manhood, met his future wife and learned a profession that would serve him later for forty years. John Henry remained with the government sponsored program three years and in 1941 he married and setteled in Squire Wva.

Seeking work once again, he was able to find work as a coal miner and it was at this point that he displayed his keen intelligence, insatiable curiosity and an ability to creatively solve problems. A couple of stories will illustrate this point. Often he would challenge his children to think through and solve problems such as how to make a needle float on water or he would ask you to solve some silly or inane riddle. Many of the questions he asked could never be solved, but were only posed to make you think. One of his favorite puzzles was a picture of a rectangle bisected by four lines. He would challenge you to draw one continous line through the rectangle and the bisected lines without crossing a line twice. A solution could never be found.

One addtional story will provide the reader of John Henry's intelligence, tenacity and his ability to use what ever at hand to complete a task. One of the first cars that he ever owned was given to him by his mother-in-law. The old Chrysler needed a great deal of work. The pistons needed new rings and the body needed extensive work as well. He had never made these type of auto repairs. In fact, he didn't have garage nor any shelter of any kind. He was truely a shade tree mechanic. John constructed a hoist using three trees tied together in a manner that formed a tripod and in the center of the tripod hung a pulley system used to lift the engine out of the automobile. Once the engine was lifted from the car, he began to overhaul the engine. Finally, he sanded the car by hand and painted it, using a spray can that was designed to to kill insects. John was indeed resourceful.

During this period of time, Agnes bore four boys and one girl, who died within a year of her birth. John worked in the coal mines from 1941 to 1953. Most of his coal mining career was spent outside the mines, He secured a job weighing and keeping track of the number of tons of coal that each miner loaded. This job required keeping accuracte records because

each miner was paid according to the number of tons they loaded. Had it not been for an accidental fire, he may have stayed in Squire until he retired. Fate, however, had something else in store for him. The mine closed because the building in which he worked was completely destroyed.

In 1953, John Henry moved his family to Huntington WVa and it is here where he thrived. He was hired as a cook at Marshall University and he recieved an opportunity to practice the trade he learned in the CCC Camp. He cooked for a number of years until he was promoted to manager of the food service department. John also managed to literally build his own home as well as owning several other rental properties. Two additional children were added to the family during this period.

John worked at Marshall forty years and was respected by students and staff. A room in one of the universitys' building, has been assigned his name, honoring the service he rendered to university. John H. Spotts died October 12, 2006. His life represents a life well lived.