

SECOND PLACE:

Shake the Dust Off

by Eureka F. Collins



My dad was a Navy veteran and always carried a warm smile on his face. I was not only a Navy brat but also a Daddy's girl! He attended all of my sport events while growing up. During my teenage years, he attended one of my softball games. A player on the visiting team hit the ball and it zapped through the air so fast that I didn't have time to avoid it.

The softball knocked me to the ground. "Get up, baby girl! Get up and shake the dust off! You can do it!" Of all the voices, I distinctly heard my dad's. After the softball game, he joyously hugged me saying, "No matter what happens in life, whether someone knocks you down or you fall down, shake the dust off and get back in the game. I love you, baby girl."

Several years later he passed away. He did not get the opportunity to give me away at my wedding nor ever meet his only grandson, Mekani, my son. I often wished to be encouraged as only he could do.

Recently, my husband stated to me while sitting in bed, "I think your dad would have been proud of all of your accomplishments in life. Especially how you get up and shake the dust off yourself." At that moment in time, I wanted so much to share my life with my dad and hear him say once more, "Shake the dust off!"

Although not physically present, I felt my dad's love and encouragement as I struggled through the death of my first son who was born twenty weeks premature. The following year, Mekani was born

at twenty-three weeks premature, weighing only 1 pound and 2.5 ounces. My husband and I prayed without ceasing.

Today, after seven surgeries, Mekani is a happy child. God has answered all of my prayers and Mekani is now eight years old. While swinging on a swing at the playground, I recall him falling from the swing. My husband and I rushed over to ensure that he was not seriously injured. As he began to stand up and pat himself, he mumbled, "I know...I am getting up and shaking the dust off me."

I asked, "Why did you say 'I know'?"

"Because Papa would always whisper for me to shake the dust off," he replied.

My husband bewilderedly looked at me and exclaimed, "I never said that to him!"

As we departed the playground, I was in deep thought. My husband drove into the parking lot of a local drugstore so that I could purchase Band-Aids for Mekani's bruise from his fall. As I was walking out of the drugstore, a woman approached me with an odd grin on her face and said, "My daughter said that was an awesome thing you did."

Looking confused, I quizzed her, "What did I do?"

"You know," the little girl exclaimed. "When you were walking, all of that pixie dust was shaking off of you."

Suddenly, I felt a strong presence of love, and with tears in my eyes, I asked to hug her daughter.

At that point I knew that both my dad and heavenly Father were proud that their little girl and grandson had learned to "Shake the dust off!"