



## Paul Ray Simmons

September 6, 1929 - March 16, 2018

### Remembrance

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Paul Ray believed in the dignity of work and that it was the duty of the able bodied to provide for themselves and their families. He believed that if someone did not work that person should not eat. He also believed in feeding the needy and that one could readily tell the difference.

Born in Minor Hill Tennessee Paul Ray was the second of five children and no stranger to hard work. He and his elder sister (Tula Mae) both pre-teens, picked cotton to earn more than their keep in support of their family. Sometimes a dollar a day each, sometimes less. The cotton field owner paid their earnings to their father. Paul Ray and Tula Mae were particularly close as they were just thirteen months apart and always attended school in the same grade. They had but one set of school books between them.

The divorce of Paul Ray's parents Sammy and Corine Simmons separated the five siblings. Tula Mae, Paul Ray, Thomas Denton, Sara Ann, and Betty Lachon. They maintained strong bonds that were forged in good times and bad. Over the years they always found solace in reunion.

Paul Ray dropped out of school in the ninth grade to work the fields of Giles County behind a plow and draft horse. Work ethic and boundless energy brought offers from landowners to work their fields and "make a crop". Educated in the cotton fields he would no longer labor for free.

Standing offers came from uncles on his mother's side of the family. "The Gatlins" Jeb, Freb, Jasper, and ER welcomed Paul Ray into their wild bunch. The "Gatlins" were rumored to do a little bit more than the law would allow. They worked the fields during the day and sometimes worked the woods by the "light of the moon".

Paul Ray enlisted in the Army at age 17 using his older sister's social security number. His work ethic was consistently rewarded and attained the rank of Staff Sergeant. He was part of Special Troops in the 31st Infantry and was dispatched to the fray of the front lines in the already raging Korean War. There, soldiers and marines battled in some of the harshest conditions and most brutal combat engagements in American history as they fought in a United Nations campaign to save South Korea from being annexed through invasion by the Chinese backed communist north. He was promoted to SFC Sergeant First Class. He and many others braved howling cold, sleepless nights, and endless firefights as they withstood the madness and turmoil of war. Then...It was over. The guns fell silent. An Armistice ended it where it started at the 38th parallel. The conflict left 2.5 million people dead. 33,262 American Servicemen killed in action. 103,284 American Servicemen wounded in action. 7,747 remain unaccounted for.

He was awarded the (CIB) Combat Infantryman Badge (KSM) Korean Service Metal w/2 Bronze Service Stars and the (UNSM) United Nations Service Metal

Money was hard to come by in the post war south. Paul Ray was drawn north to the prosperous wages of Chicago. There he found work as a "Gandy

Dancer" (Worker that lays down and maintains railroad track) for The Interlake Steel Company. So vast was Interlake's operation that it had two plants in Chicago. The "Coke Plant" operation on the south side and the "Blast Furnace" operation on the east side and both were connected by a miles long materials conveyor belt that passed over highways, waterways, and other industries.

Thirteen miles of railroad track snaked and connected to delivery points for materials within the "yard" at Interlake's east side facility. He shined as a worker that believed in an hours work for an hours pay. Always on time his work ethic and reliability were soon to be noticed.

Promoted to Yard Foreman Paul Ray had his mission statement. Make trainworthy 13 miles of zig zagging railroad track. At the time of his promotion there were 2 derailments per month. After 4 years of leading the gandy dancer gang he was summoned to an executive office of Interlake steel. He wondered what he'd done wrong and fretted that he might get fired for reasons unknown to him.

The summoning of workers to the executive offices usually portends dismissal or reprimand. To his surprise his trepidation was unfounded. The management had noticed that there had been no train derailments for 2 years. Interlake Steel wanted his attention to task and work ethic at the heart of their operation. He was now a foreman at the Blast Furnace.

The Blast Furnace is likened by many to another planet for good reason. It's a place where molten steel glowing orange and white is poured into casts at temperatures nearing 3 thousand degrees. Emitting a light so bright that workers wear purple eye protection like that of a welder.

Paul Ray was held in high regard at Interlake Steel and his position wasn't lost on the young men of the neighborhood. Knocks on the door at all times of the day and night found people pleading for work in the job scarce market of the 70's. Interlake Steel had a applicant waiting list numbering over a thousand. Employed there were electricians, pipefitters, welders, railroad workers, heavy equipment operators, and more. If Paul Ray liked you... You didn't show up for an interview... You showed up to take a physical, get your work boots, and your employee rules and benefits book. Many young fathers were given the opportunity to learn trades and provide for their families through him.

For vacations there was only one destination on his mind. That place was Giles County Tennessee. Lots of family remained there. Those sentiments were always reflected in his stories and phone calls. He visited every year, sometimes twice. He endured the north but he loved the south.

After thirty-three years in the industrial grind of the steel mill he put the place where buildings grow taller than the trees in his rear view mirror. It had been a place of prosperity but not of serenity. Paul Ray was going home to the green rolling hills of his childhood.

Retirement did not find him idling away. He continued to work. First as a security officer for Frito Lay and then starting a stump grinding business that operated all over the county. He made friends easily and was well liked by many.

Afflicted with Alzheimers Paul Ray's eighty third year found it gaining ground. His short term memory was spotty at best yet he could still recall stories of his youth in vivid detail. Old photos were sifted through and powerful images were copied for him to browse at his leisure. He was uplifted as he gathered memories about who he was and where he came from. These pictures evoked warm feelings and prompted stories often punctuated with laughter and the conjuring of more memories. He told these stories with zeal and

consistency. His favorite--- A picture with his four siblings and their mother all of them barefoot in front of the log cabin in which they once lived. He said they spelled poor with "three zeroes". It was a moment in time. A piece of his life. With pictures in hand he swam through the memories effortlessly. It was only the present that found him thrashing the waters of his turbulent thoughts.

Paul Ray knew something wasn't right with him. Still he soldiered on. He found tasks everyday. He worked in his garden. He filled the water trough for his cows and continually overfed them. He mended fences and cut wood with his chainsaw. He mowed the lawn, the rocks, and the tree roots. He picked pears and grew strawberries.

When an ill advised family member broached the subject of a nursing home he was insulted and emphatic that he would never reside in one. He told his children if they forced him out of his home he'd consider that an unforgivable betrayal. His wish was to die his own home. He asserted that as his right and his children agreed. It was then resolved he would not be going to a nursing home. EVER

In his eighty eighth year Paul Ray restlessly entered the "Sundowning" stage. As the day grows old and the sun goes down many stricken with Alzheimers insist on going home. It is a continuous and persistent pursuit to return to the safety and security of their childhood. Behind the wheel of his truck again my father in his best jeans and fanciest hat searched around for his keys taken from him years prior. He wanted to go home. I got better at "talking him down". I promised to take him home in the morning. I lied every time. He was in pain and I was sharing it. I'd take it all if I could, but I couldn't. I couldn't save him. I couldn't cure him. I couldn't comfort him. I could only protect him. I was sharing the agony of his disease. I was the witness.

The early morning rousings as a teen on Saturday mornings as if I was late for

the obstacle course. The childhood perforated with harshness and the pleasing of my father a seeming obstacle I couldn't overcome. He wanted me to be tough and I was, but, I was also angry. In some moments of clarity he thanked me for being with him and he knew why. We had some arguments and we had some laughs and for the first time in our lives we had each other. As I lay near my dying father all of the misgivings of past evaporated. The anger. The resentment. The distance. Gone. There was nothing left but understanding, forgiveness, and love.

Paul Ray was finally going home. He was at peace and so were we. His ashes were scattered in his beloved garden in a small private ceremony where he tended his crops. The farm now forever his.

This rise and fall of the sun--never halts. Back to the earth goes some of her salt.

He drank of its milk and tasted its honey.

For Paul Ray Simmons

Tennessee... Will always be...

The green green grass of home

When listening to one of his many stories, for me, it was the hundredth time. For him, it was the first. I'd chuckle at the punch lines and feign surprise while gazing into his blues eyes...and they were my eyes. I was him and he was me. A part of me died with his passing but something else was born. Sometimes lessons in life are learned from death.

Paul Ray Simmons was preceded in death by his beloved sister Tula Mae. He is survived through his brother (Thomas Denton and wife Glenda) and his sisters (Sara Ann) and (Betty Lachon). He is also survived through his

children (Paul Joseph and wife Oksana), (Perry Ray), and (Robin Elaine and husband Tom). He had three grandchildren. Kimberly, Kyle, and Frank. He had four great grandchildren. Lauren, Seth, Leo, and Ian with more to come. He had a special love for Dorothy, Megan, and Jay as they too were family. He is survived most importantly by the ideal of America. He fostered it from an early age. He was part of the can do generation that made America Great and the standard and envy of the world.

The family asks that mourners and well wishers not send flowers to anyone or anyplace. Instead to do an act of kindness for any living thing.

Some pictures below

# Tribute Wall

RO

“ *Dad, I wish I could have had five more minutes with you. I feel you beside me and know you are in my heart forever. Until we meet again...Love, Robin*

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**Robin** - February 09, 2018 at 04:11 PM

RR

“ *RIP Paul. I know u and Tula are in no more pain!*

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**rodger Rankhorn** - February 09, 2018 at 04:11 PM

BD

“ *Lit a candle in memory of Paul Ray Simmons*

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**Bobbie Dellinger** - February 09, 2018 at 04:11 PM

LA

“ *I would like to have had the time with my brother, that i was stopped from seeing by .because i didn't agree the way he was taken care off properly. If he was in such pain and sick why wasn't he taken to a doctor he may be alive today . I did not know about my brothers death until two days after he passed. I had no way of knowing what happened or where his ashes was placed. I know my brother is as peace and taken care of now . I love my brother very much and i will miss you Lachon*

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**Lachon** - February 09, 2018 at 04:11 PM

VR

“ I can remember when Bobbie, Wayne and I would go visit uncle Paul and Billie Jo in Indiana when we were kids. And one time Paul and I was coming back to Tennessee from Indiana and he let me drive. I was only 15 at the time.

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**vicki Rankhorn** - February 09, 2018 at 04:11 PM

LA

“ Miss you on this Christmas Day. I know you are safe now, and in a better place. God will watch over you now. Love you. be thinking about you every day'

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**Lachon** - February 09, 2018 at 04:11 PM

KI

“ RIP Papa, you were very special to me. I wish I had the chance to thank you for taking care of me when I was a kid. I will always remember your quick wit and jokes, many memories of laughter. I am glad you're at peace and resting. ❤️ Kim

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**Kim** - February 09, 2018 at 04:11 PM

KI

“ I'm sorry Aunt Lachon, Dorothy called me a work about 4 days after he passed. I had no idea either. I am glad he is at peace as well. I have many fond memories of him. I'm glad someone put together an obituary. Love Kim

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**Kim** - February 09, 2018 at 04:11 PM

RR

“ Rest In Peace Paul. I know you and Tula are in no more pain.  
Rodger Rankhorn

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**rodger Rankhorn** - February 09, 2018 at 04:11 PM