

The Three Piece Suit *by Rick Reil*

Sometimes poverty has a way of exacerbating poor decisions. Not that the decision was really poor, but for a poor family it was one of trying to do the right thing that wasn't really necessary. It also wasn't helping with the family finances since Gramps was dead and wouldn't really appreciate the new three piece suit with the extra pair of pants...but then a family needs to keep up appearances, even if most of the neighbors are living in 40 year-old single-wide trailer houses in the Pink Flamingo Mobile Home Court.

Not what you'd call an upper scale neighborhood but it was a tight-knit community of struggling families and old retired folks. The court was a place of down-to-earth people who relied on each other for friendship and many other forms of help that residents of a typical middle class neighborhood probably wouldn't understand.

The Thompson family was typical of the big hearted residents of the court. Boyd Kesler had lived next door to the Thompsons for years. His wife Edna had died about ten years earlier. The couple, married for 54 years, had no children or any close relatives. Like many in the court, their family was the good people who lived around them. The Thompson's had looked after Boyd since Edna passed and their children grew up calling him "Gramps". He was handy and helped with small repairs

and contributed to the family grocery bills. He pretty much spent the last few years of his life living with the family who made sure he was comfortable and loved.

Boyd was diagnosed with liver cancer the previous year. The doctors told him he had between six months and a year to live. At 87 years old Boyd accepted his fate and anxiously awaited his long desire to join Edna on the other side. The Thompsons made sure his last days were happy ones. The 14 year old twin boys, Gary and Larry, helped with the heavy lifting and 16 year-old McKenzie read to him when his eyesight began to fail. He died peacefully in his sleep on the couch in the living room.

The coroner came and took care of the procedures necessary to provide a death certificate and called the funeral home.

Peggy Thompson, a single mom to her three children, barely made ends meet with her job as the lunch lady at nearby Dubois Middle School. Since Boyd wasn't a blood relative the state would foot the bill for the burial. The choice was cremation or burial in a cheap flat-top coffin. Since there was no next of kin the funeral home director let them make the decision. They decided that cremation was okay and they would have the ashes buried in Edna's plot. It was also decided that a viewing

was needed since Gramps was loved by most everyone in the Pink Flamingo Mobile Home Court. This is where the three piece suit comes in.

Boyd's wardrobe consisted of a couple of pairs of old, worn bib overalls, a sweat suit, a couple of old, double knit, bell-bottom leisure suits, and a few flannel shirts. He wore cheap Walmart tennis shoes with Velcro fastening straps. That was pretty much all he had. How could you properly have a viewing with clothes like that? Peggy decided that Boyd needed to look good for once in his life, even if his life was over.

The family pooled its resources along with some help from their closest neighbors and raised \$139.28. Peggy and the kids loaded up in the old beat-up 30 year-old Ford Taurus station wagon and headed down to the Wagon Wheel Western Wear clothing store, the only clothing store in their small town of Dubois, located in the northwest part of Wyoming. They were greeted by Homer Pratt, the local LDS bishop who owned the store.

Homer asked the family how he could help. The Johnsons were members of his congregation but rarely attended church. They were good friends though and the church had been of help to the family on many occasions. "Bishop Homer, you remember Boyd Kesler?" "Yes, Peggy, I'm so sorry, I heard he passed away yesterday. How can I help?"

Peggy answered and explained about the viewing and the need for a suit.

"What did you have in mind?" he asked.

"Well you know Boyd worked for the local ranchers most of his working years. We thought he would look good in a western suit," she answered.

"What is your budget?" he asked.

"One hundred thirty-nine dollars and twenty-eight cents."

"Well I think we can find something, he was about the same size as Gary and Larry, right?" he asked.

Peggy said he was.

He explained that he had a new suit that had been around for quite some time and he would let them have it for \$50.

"That's all?" Peggy explained.

"That's right, it's a little out of style but that's not such a big deal with a western suit."

"Can we see it?" she asked.

"Better than that, let's have one of the twins try it on, how about you Larry?"

Larry said he would be honored to do it for Boyd. Homer went and fetched the suit. While walking back with it he said, "It's a three piece with an extra pair of pants."

"What are we going to do with an extra pair of pants?" asked Gary.

Peggy laughed and said, "We'll save them for resurrection day, he can wear them then."

They all laughed at the joke and Peggy paid Homer \$50 for the suit. Homer asked if they were going to have a funeral.

Peggy answered, "We're going to have a viewing but hadn't thought much about a funeral. The state's paying for the cremation but not for a funeral."

Homer answered, "We can have it at the church and it won't cost a penny."

"Bishop... Boyd wasn't a member of the church."

"That's not a problem, the only requirement is that he has to be one of Heavenly Father's children."

"Boyd was one of this best... can we have the service next Saturday?"

"Of course, the ward members will take care of everything, you just get the word out to the people down at the mobile home court. Let me know if any of them would like to say a few words at the service."

Homer wrapped up the suit, handed it to Peggy and walked them to the door. After they left he call the funeral home and discussed the arrangements. The viewing was set for Friday evening and the funeral for 11 a.m. the following day. The viewing went off without a hitch. Everyone commented on how good Boyd look in his nice new suit.

Saturday came and half the little town showed up for Boyd's service. Peggy brought Boyd's ashes in a small cardboard box and kept it on

her lap during the service. In typical LDS fashion, there were songs and talks and a time for Boyd's neighbors to say a few words. Peggy and her kids along with several other friends drove out to the little cemetery. The twins dug a hole in Edna's plot and buried Boyd's ashes with his beloved wife. McKenzie sang 'Amazing Grace' A Capella.

They all returned to the church and shared a lunch with many of the town's folks, most of them their were their mobile home court neighbors. As they were leaving the church the bishop stopped Peggy and handed her a package.

"What's this?" Peggy asked?

"A three piece suit with and extra pair of pants," he said, "John Kimball, the funeral home director dropped it off last night after the viewing. He said it was too nice a suit to destroy, He said he thought I would find a home for it. I'm sure Boyd would have wanted the boys to have it. I had it cleaned and pressed this morning. If you decide to come to church the boy's may want to wear it. One can wear the vest, the other the coat...there's a pair of pants for each of them."

Peggy's eyes welled with tears. "Thank you bishop," she said, "We'll see you tomorrow."

Homer smiled, turned off the lights, locked the church door and headed back to his store.