

“Sandy clams!”

[Story told by Robert Sivinski during Wallman’s Memorial Session at the Joint Statistical Meetings in Tennessee]

This saying is a little bit of a deep cut, but it was always special to me because it was one that Katherine didn’t use outside of her family very often. One day, we were walking into OMB together through the security checkpoint, and the little gate arm swung up early when she was walking through and whacked her in the leg. She turned to the Secret Service agent next to us and said, “That thing just hit me, and it hurt!” The agent looked up a little and said, “Yeah, it’s been doing that.” So, Katherine plants her hands on her hips, raises her eyebrows, and says, “Excuse me?” The agent gets all flustered and says, “I’m sorry, Ma’am, I’ll ask someone to come fix it.”

Which was a classic Katherine interaction, and I think a lot of us who knew her have been on the receiving end of one like it.

So, as we were walking out, she leans over and said, “That’s what we call in my family ‘sandy clams.’” And she tells me a story: she went out to dinner with her family and ordered some kind of pasta with clams. It was inedible because the clams were so gritty. When the waiter came by, she told him that her clams had sand in them and she couldn’t eat them. The waiter’s response was, “Yeah, I’ve heard that a lot tonight.”

So, from then on, the saying in her family was “sandy clams!” whenever someone was failing to take responsibility and acting like they were powerless to do anything.