

Arnold C Swanson
Eulogy
June 22, 2011

On August 2, 1945, a 26-year-old soldier recovering in a military hospital near Chicago wrote a letter to his kid brother back home.

“Bye for now, Carlton, and remember to trust in the Lord, because, after all, that’s the only thing that really counts.”

In a few months, that soldier would be dead.

Today, nearly 66 years later, we are here because Arnold Carlton Swanson took his brother Kermit’s counsel.

Mom wanted you to hear a bit more about Dad’s life than we shared in the obituary.

When the stock market crashed in October of 1929, Alma and Charles Swanson knew that their fourth son was about six months away. Charles was an entrepreneur. He applied it to farming. And he ended up moving a lot. The economic crisis made things difficult. The family moved to Big Fork in 1933 and then Charles died in 1936. Kermit was 17, Gordon was 16, Ken was 11, and Carlton was 6.

Over the next 9 years, Kermit left for the Army. Gordon left for the Marines. Alma, Ken and Carlton moved to Minneapolis. The brothers owned a truck and hauled sod. Arnold parked cars in a garage.

In 1949, he started at the University of Minnesota and he started working for A.D. Strong. He sold commercial real estate, shopping malls. He worked for the Jaycees. In 1951, when he was 21, Gordon wrote him a letter. Not as brothers, but as a professor at UM to a leader of the Jaycees recommending 6 international students for a study program. The brothers must have loved it.

And then he went to Korea. This bright young man with a promising career and great leadership skills went to serve his country. He was the fourth of four boys to go.

There’s a lot he never said about that time. We know that he drove buses while waiting to ship overseas. We know that he tossed the case of his camera overboard so no one knew he had the camera. We know that he worked in military intelligence. But he was looking at our soldiers, kind of like internal affairs. I know that he went into prison camps. I know that he got to know a chaplain. I know that he always put his shoes on when he got up even before his pants because the floors were so cold.

And I know that on Easter 1953, he and a friend went out to a jeep to go to church and the jeep blew up. And his friend died. And dad was shot in the arm by the people who planted the bomb. The American soldiers who planted the bomb.

And he spent seven months in the hospital teaching him to despise hospitals, busy work, rehab, and, I think, facemasks and respiratory therapy.

So in 1953, we have a 23 year old man who has grown up without a dad, in the depression. Who watched his brother die young, moved from the farm to the city early in high school, and then nearly dies.

And what does he do?

He goes back to A.D. Strong. But somehow he starts working as a volunteer for a small organization that helps churches tell boys about Jesus. He talked about kids and honesty from those days. He said a kid came up to him and said "Mister, you have a big head," He said he thought about it. And, he said, the kid was right. And somewhere in that head, and heart, he knew that God was calling him from business to telling people about Jesus, and the first assignment was boys and men.

And somehow he finds a new girl. He had dated. In fact, Arnold and Ardis met when he was bringing her roommate home from a date. They sat and chatted in the living room. And he called her the next day. And they never turned back. Never.

And so, by 1955, dad's got his assignment for his work life and he's got his partner for life.

And the rest of his life, down to last Friday when my parents were sitting together holding hands and the respiratory therapist was next to the bed and he asked her about the cross she was wearing, that's what he did.

In 1955, he started working for Christian Service Brigade as the representative for Minnesota. He became the representative for western Canada and the western states. And by 1968, we moved to Carol Stream so dad could be the Vice President and director of development.

He was responsible for building the new building for Brigade headquarters, just like he had built Camp Nathanael.

But always, there was the why. It was about the gospel and boys and men.

- Though he was ordained, God never called him to be a pastor. But he did get a time as an interim for a church in Chicago, a time that he loved. But he stayed with Brigade.
- He had opportunities to move into higher education, to move back to Minnesota, but he stayed with Brigade.
- He even had to move his office home for awhile. The president had a grandiose view of Brigade. Dad knew it was about the people, the staff guys working in the lives of men working in the lives of boys. The president left. Dad moved back

into his office.

But, I think, it wasn't ever about the program. Programs could come and go, but building lives is about the people. Never about formulas. Except the gospel.

I did not understand my dad. Often. What he was valuing didn't always make sense.

He was a handkerchief guy in a Kleenex world.
He was a marching band guy in a rock and roll world.
He was a stewardship guy in a disposable world.

And in 1996 he retired. And had the first of his strokes. And the speech that came so simple all his life became much harder. Many of you know that the humor didn't change, the insights didn't change, the eyes didn't change, but he had to slow down.

But here's what I think. I think that he had offered himself as a living sacrifice. And while he needed the words to come easily, they did, traveling across the country. Now, in his retirement, he was slowed down to sit in a coffee shop in Webster and become part of the lives of some guys who wouldn't have talked to the conference speaker but loved this slow-speaking, listening man who knew Jesus. And sitting in a small group in the living room on Wednesdays, praying for someone else who led.

So what do we have?

The man whose body was broken in Korea devoted himself to serving God.

The man who grew up without a dad built a passion for caring about the souls of young men into generations of men around this country.

The man who lost his speed and speech kept speaking into the lives of a new circle of people and grandkids.

The only reason he would find any value in what we are doing right now is this. Take the things that look broken and offer them to God. And let Him finish the story.

Walk out of here and do something that matters. For Jesus.

Because, as Kermit said,

“Bye for now, Carlton, and remember to trust in the Lord, because, after all, that's the only thing that really counts.”