

About Arnold Carsey

I wrote on the paper, “Last Wednesday my Grandfather died...”

I soaked in the steamy hot bathtub, the water up to the drainpipe, gurgling now and then as the water splashed through it. This was the most relaxed I had been in the last eighteen hours. The tenseness in my back loosened as the heat soaked through the skin and reached the deep muscle. After awhile I pulled the plug and lay on my stomach in the still warm water as the tub emptied. The air hitting my bare back was cold and icy as compared with the still warmth of the water against my chest and cheek.

I thought of Grandpa. “That is how death is—cold. The warm water is life like the warmth of a live body, but sometimes hot is death, as summer in the Mohave desert that I visited last summer. There warmth is not life. Come to think of it, Grandpa was not hot or cold. He was warm. He was calm—he was steady. He had a lively interest in me, but not enough to smother. I did no wrong to him, nor did he get excited about my rights. He was there to listen—to be steady—An ear. He was there. Now he’s not.”

Asked how he was doing, his immediate response was a find of “thank-you” half-smile, and he verbalized “Slow- -”. Grandpa used to be a track star in high school. He must have loved feeling strong and running fast and being fit like I do. And now he was “slow”. Just think, today in heaven he is running, free and fast. He can be everywhere and anywhere and his body doesn’t hinder him anymore. Think how happy he must be to run fast and free after nine and one-half years of “slow- -”. I’m glad for him.

I’m sad for me and Grandma. He was slow. He was tired, but he was THERE. Grandma took too much care of him. And he scolded her. I used to get mad at Grandpa for saying mean things to Grandma on those occasions because it wasn’t fair. She did so much for him. Sure she pushed him to do more, but for his own good. How could he be so mean? She never said mean things to him; just worried, and loved and pushed him.

Grandpa never criticized anyone or anything except Grandma. That’s how much he thought of her. She was worthy of his criticism. The rest of the world was not.

“Now Grandpa, just because you’re up there running free, don’t think you’re off the hook! Grandma needs you, and you just better look after her and don’t forget your obligations. You walk with her and make her keep up those piano lessons for the kids in the neighborhood, and keep going to church with her.” Your favorite question on Sunday afternoon when the family came by was “Did you go to church services this morning”. It was a gentle reminder that sometimes embarrassed, but I smiled with warm satisfaction when I could answer, “Yes, Grandpa, I sure did”. Church must have been mighty important in your life. I heard Grandma say that you often embarrassed friends and neighbors in the same way, “Did you take in the ecclesiastical services this morning?”. I must admit that your concern encouraged a diligence that was sometimes lacking — sometimes. Now that you’re not here to say it to me, It’s up to me to say it to myself. You know, Grandpa, if it was that important to you ———.

Frank thought his Father was a pessimist; that he was unhappy and unsatisfied with his life; that he always yearned to be a big success, but did not make it. I rebuke that idea. Perhaps in Grandpa’s own eyes he didn’t achieve all the successes he wanted, but to most people he was a tremendous success. “How is that”, Frank questioned. “Well, I guess it depends on your own personal definition of success. Raising four healthy, intelligent, successful children would be the idea of being tremendously successful. How many people in this world have achieved that?”, I answered. “What more is there really?”

Grandpa felt that making money was the most important thing, that when he couldn’t work life lost meaning for him. Yes, work was important to him, gave his a feeling of contributing to the world, a justification for this existence. He was frustrated because he couldn’t work. But that didn’t make him a failure. It’s equivalent to an athlete not being able to run; to a singer not being able to sing; it takes a lot of the zest out of life, but it doesn’t mean that person is a failure because he is frustrated. Some people can turn that frustration around and

become successful at different pursuits. After 68 years of vigorous healthy living Arnold just couldn't do that. I'm thinking again of his childhood ; his being the recipient, the receiver of care and attention as the youngest child. Perhaps his lack of persistent effort at exercise and rehabilitation after his stroke might even go back that far. Perhaps he was waiting to be the receiver of good health again. He was poorly equipped to deal with the painful road necessary regain full mobility but he was not totally unhappy.

He loved to travel. With a grip planned he regained vigor. He usually returned from a journey more energetic than when he left. At least until the end when it seemed he must have been having a series of small, almost unnoticed strokes that were pulling him down physically and mentally. Also, he was courageous. Yes! I said courageous. Can you imagine yourself in a similar physical condition being anxious to go one-half way around the world to London, England, let along many excursions across the United States. I dare you to tell me that is not bravery. Of course, that is on Elizabeth's part too.

So-o-o, making money was his interest. That's much better than many people's interests. Don't deny him his ideals. Money wasn't everything. Church seemed to el numero one with him. He had his priorities right. Next was family. Then was his work and the capacity to earn. He certainly was not self-centered. He didn't want worldly goods for himself. He even rejected celebration of occasions with presents for himself. There was not selfishness in his desire to earn money. It was probably a lifetime definition of what it meant to be a respected citizen in this existence.

Yes, I can fault him his depression and frustration, but I can also understand it.

He used to say "Company and fish stink after three days". That applied when he came to my house. But when I came to his house he said, "Why don't you stay another day — or another week". He loved company, but also loved being in his own home. Both together were the cream in his coffee! I've never seen such a one for encouraging Grandma to have a neighborhood get-together; then sitting back quietly in a corner watching all the folks have a good time. I think he was a people watcher. He didn't involve himself in too much conversation. "Sing-a-longs" were the most satisfying for him. I wonder if there were "sing-a-longs" in his childhood.

Grandpa was the youngest in a family of six. His big sister Emmalu practically raised him. He was the baby of the family to whom all catered. Maybe that's why he sits and watches. Maybe happenings and things are initiated by others for him to enjoy. Maybe he was the appreciative audience for the clowning and antics of his older brothers and sister. Maybe he was not "hot" and not "cold" because his way was padded by the inadvertent blunders of the older children. So it was that he watched, learned, and was insulated from the casualties resultant from childhood mistakes. He grew up more passive. Who says passivity is not a good trait? Some do. Perhaps that is shortsighted. There must be a wall to bounce off of sometimes. Perhaps that wall is really an anchor. Kids today live in a boom-a-rang society. If there were more quiet corners and more "warm" grandpas we boom-a-rangs might find more useful things in life than just bouncing off trees and whirling with the breezes. A time to think, a chance to appreciate—, I have almost forgotten what it is. I think many have never known.

My nutty sister loved him. She had the kind of brashness that told the world where to get off, and he loved it! He was a great audience for the entertainer, and that she is. Woody Allen might have run a poor second to her. She liked him—and you know why? He never criticized her. Maybe we're all too critical today. I guess Grandpa never wanted to walk in anyone else's shoes. Maybe that he why he was kind, but I really don't think that was it. I think he was curious about people in a way that didn't judge. He appreciated people just for being. How rare that is. I didn't appreciate this quality, or even think of it until now.

What is gone is sanctified.