

September 22, 2020

A life well lived....

My father, G. Albert Anderson, came into the world on the eve of the Great Wall Street Crash of 1929, on September first. He was born at home with the assistance of a mid-wife on Jay Street and was the son of George Yngve Anderson and Swedish born, Elsa Linnea Garell Anderson. Dad's first language was Swedish, and he spoke the distinct dialect of the province of Dalarna, where his mother was born and raised. He continued to speak Swedish daily until he was 16 as his *farmor* (father's mother) Elna, and his *farmor's mor* (great-grandmother) Johanna, both lived out their length of years in this generational setting; the two older women had little or no ability in English. Five years after his birth, the family added a brother, Arnold, or as we know him, Uncle Andy.

By first grade, Dad lived in South Gardner on 61 Lovewell Street where the parental home remained until sometime after the boys were grown and gone. In that first year at Prospect Street School, his English was marginal enough that an emissary was sent to the Anderson home to request that they speak more English. Dad always did well in school and was salutatorian of his high school class. Around that time, he was named a first alternate candidate to West Point. Had he been selected, he quite possibly would have not survived the Korean War. He was later found to be too tall (6' 5") when he tried to enlist in the Army Air Corp.

Al was a gifted musician, playing the clarinet and gathering in awards already in high school. He was in a polka band that, among other venues, played for the WWII German prisoners held at Fort Devens. Somewhere in his college years, he was approached by a scout for the travelling Benny Goodman Orchestra and offered a seat. Dad had his eyes firmly set on the lovely Nancy Wright, however, and the rest is history. They married June 28, 1952.

When Dad graduated from WPI in 1951, times were good; and he had several opportunities from which to choose. Father George told him to take the one in New York City with Ingersoll-Rand even though it did not offer the best pay. He thought it would give Dad a broader background and outlook which he'd never regret. So, Mom and Dad lived in New Jersey until 1954, and Dad took the ferry into NYC. In 1953, our brother Mark was born in Orange, NJ.

Alan Keyworth of Gardner's Collier-Keyworth Co. had business to attend to in New York and made it a point to look up his former lawn mowing and shoeshine teenage employee. Ultimately, this led to a job offer in Gardner. Dad accepted, and here we are still today.

During this next phase of Dad's life, Nils (1957) and I (1955) were added to the family. Life continued on. There were family vacations, our two top spots being Nantucket Island and Lake Monomonock. Mom and Dad sailed. Dad got to play his clarinet every now and again. He enjoyed yardwork. Mom and Dad had many friends and went to the B&C (ball and chain) dances. He worked hard. He served on innumerable committees and boards (Republican City Committee, church, bank, etc.) He tried his hand at developing a couple of businesses: Trish Energetics and Para Defense. He helped people behind the scenes with things like keeping their homes, finding a way to finance nursing home placements and other significant needs. No life is trouble free, and we all navigated together and sometimes individually those turbulent phases or moments of health crises, rebellious teenagers, job crises, and difficult personalities to their conclusion.

Dad was a consummate diplomat, but also firm, focused, compassionate, and kind. He was an excellent listener.

Dad's personal motto was "Leave the world a better place than you found it." He was a contributor of time, talent and treasure wherever he was involved. He wanted to create opportunities to lift those in his community and was involved in numerous activities: civic, cultural, educational, financial, political, church, etc. He believed that change, or positive development in society, all came down to the individual versus an over-reliance on policy or politics as "fixer" of ills.

The things we do and accomplish in life can certainly be good and noble, enriching and worthy, as they were for Dad; but the most important thing about life, the show you do not want to miss, is a relationship with God. Dad was a committed, lifelong Christian of the Lutheran variety. When he was in high school, he was approached by an influential, local Swedish patriarch who offered to pay for his education if he would consider becoming a Lutheran pastor. He told me that he gave it serious consideration, but he did not feel the ultimate tug from God in that direction. When he was at WPI, he went to see Billy Graham with his fraternity brothers. He did not go down for the famously offered call at the end to commit one's life to Christ, because he felt that he had already made that commitment in his heart earlier, but he told me he would have if not for that. Our parents saw to it that we received a consistent religious education. It wasn't just Mom's idea. Dad was fully on board and supportive of our attendance Sunday School, Jr. Choir, Youth Group and Confirmation. When the family went on vacation, we went to church on Sunday wherever we were. Mom and Dad did not race the Flying Dutchman on Sundays because the race times always conflicted with church services. When WPI prepared to write a biographical segment on Dad as a contributing alumnus, they wanted to edit out his commitment to his church in his *curriculum vitae*. He told them "it stays"; the editor was disappointed. I am not. Dad knew the Author of his success in life. He was himself given the chart and compass to guide him to where he lives today and forever through Christian instruction and the witness of his father in particular. He knew how to get there, and you know the way too, through Jesus, as your personal Lord and Savior. Never reject the beauty and power of walking with God. It is the beacon for your ship in the night and a soft, warm breeze surrounding you on a perfect day. Be there. Be there.

The latter years of Dad's life included moving to Texas twice, together with Mom, to be *in loco parentis* over the total course of 2.5 years for Mark's children, Chris and Cameron, while Mark endured medical treatments for myelofibrosis/ leukemia. These were tough years for several reasons, but the dementia that was brewing in his once strong brain was becoming more pronounced, at least to his immediate family. He was a trooper and slogged through all Mark's copious paperwork for all his properties and construction business as best he could. He had to deal with the banks and Houston city offices. I look back and marvel.

Mom's heart issues manifested and progressed rather quickly; Dad was set adrift with her passing. She knew the road ahead for him was going to be a personal struggle. She apologized to Nils and me for leaving him in our care. I wish I had told her to not apologize, that it was in God's hands. As it turns out, I think I was in the right place at the right time to help Dad. Starting in 2012, I came in on Saturday evening and stayed through Sunday evening with few exceptions. I re-directed his sail for the week, did things around the house, and was an anchor as someone who knew much of his life and could fill in the gaps in conversations when others did not know what he was talking about. During this time, Carol entered Dad's

life. She was so wonderful to him in so many ways, and I trust that Dad, despite his declining cognitive health, was a mutual blessing. Without Carol, Dad would have been flapping in the breeze and been at a complete loss. She made all the difference to him. We are so grateful to her.

Dad moved to Broadview Assisted Living in mid-March of 2019, by his own request as he realized his own need. He experienced a big cognitive decline in July of that same year. He had episodes of deteriorating brain health that lead him to the ER eight times this past year, with the last one being his final trip. We trust that he could hear us when we spoke to him, and I hope he heard all the hymns I played for him. The unintentional last one I played, just before 7 p.m., was *Abide with Me* (Henry F. Lyte) in a Welsh choir version. Here it is for you by Audrey Assad. It is one of the super classics of the church universal.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=84YASWe3_2Q

1. *Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide;
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, oh, abide with me.*
2. *Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see—
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.*
3. *I need Thy presence every passing hour;
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's pow'r?
Who, like Thyself, my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.*
4. *I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless;
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness;
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.*
5. *Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies;
Heav'n's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.*

And now, here we are today, gathered to remember this wonderful man. I will certainly miss him, but we will meet again. Of that I am sure.

Ellen (Anderson) Johnson

