

Eulogy for  
Eric Swain Stearns  
April 30, 1896 – December 30, 1984

*by Ronald Eric Wenzinger, his grandson*

When I was asked to do this, I was quite hesitant. It is not a question of wanting to; I am honored to have been asked. But I am afraid of what I might forget that would be important to some of you. Because he was not only my grandpa, he was that to nine others of you as well; and grandfather-in-law to even more of you. Of course, he was a father and an uncle, too. And to many more, a neighbor, friend, choir member, even your tax assessor. So who am I to remember him for you? You all have your own memories.

But since I must, I am tempted to remember him with a string of humorous anecdotes. After all, who can forget his monstrous sneezes? But some more somber recollections are in order as well.

Eric Stearns was born in 1896, a long time ago for most of us. He watched American life change from horse-and-buggy days to the arrival of man on the moon. And he would seldom miss keeping up with the progress by watching the morning news, the noon news, and Walter Cronkite. He grew up in Boston, served his country in World War I, and came home to Washington. But he always kept his love for New England.

He met Grandma in Washington; and this gentle, romantic man proposed to her by putting a diamond ring in the middle of a box of candy for her. He “sparked” Grandma on his motorcycle. He continued to romance her with Evening in Paris perfume ... every Christmas ... even though she never used it. But Grandpa always worked at being married. After 55 years of marriage, he was heard to say, “We’re hoping it will last.” And even when Grandma was in great pain, he hurt wit her; he held her, trying to take her pain away.

But besides pain, they shared a great deal of joy and fun. A quart of ice cream became a great family adventure. And there were always such things as the Thanksgiving turkey they raised that he could not kill ... and no one could eat. He was too much of an old softie. He took his children everywhere he could. Although he traveled for his job, he came home at vacation time, picked up the family, and traveled some more. He could not even discipline his children because he was so gentle; he left that to Grandma.

To many, he was Uncle Eric. And he was a favorite uncle in that he took many nieces and nephews to their favorite swimming hole regularly. While he may have been a wonderful father and uncle, these years of practice made him a perfect grandfather. Some evidences of his monumental patience still linger today. There are remnants of a bridge across a creek, a collapsing tree house, and a rusty old pump for “pumping up the cows.”

This perfect grandpa never missed the arrival of a new grandchild, either. He and Grandma always arrived as soon as possible to help out ... even if he didn’t do “messy diapers.” But he did make noises! Grandpa made great sounds of animals to entertain us ... as long as we remained quiet for the news shows!

Grandpa taught us to salute the flag. For Grandpa was a patriot in the best sense of the word. He always kept his uniform from World War I and flew his flag every day. He was proud to work for his country in his career and, later, for his township as tax assessor. Yet this patriotism was never shown; he was just a good citizen.

Eric Stearns would help anyone. He would take in stray animals, he welcomed many visitors, and he helped out in his community. There were parks and churches to build, and an effort to save the old swimming hole. And there was his service to the South Harford Cemetery, where he now goes to rest.

I cannot ever remember Grandpa missing church. He sang in choirs for 70 years. Like his patriotism, Grandpa's Christianity was by quiet, consistent example. What he spoke so loudly that we could not hear what he said. And that is saying a great deal. For he was not a quiet, soft-spoken man. In fact, some of what he said often put Archie Bunker to shame. But his heart was not in such verbiage. Most often, I think, it was simply a way to get Grandma to say, "Oh, Eric!"

He was a sports fan even when he had trouble following the games later in his life. At these times, his sense of humor carried him and his snappy answers never left him. My favorite remembrances of him are of Grandpa carrying a full cup of coffee to the dinner table and rattling it on the saucer. I can still hear him asking Grandma if she was "gettin' neuvous." And this would always be followed by his soft, low chuckle (huh, huh, huh).

Yet he was better known for being a bit loud. He was noisy and talked to himself. He even talked to the lawnmower! But he was careful with his tools and cars, and made them last a long time.

So what would Grandpa want for us for this day? I am sure he would be pleased with our singing but a bit uncomfortable with all of the nice words. I think that he would not want us to be too sad but he might want to be missed a little bit. Yet it seems more appropriate to me to remember his overall love for others rather than to lean too much on specific acts. So let's learn from the life of this dear man. Let us learn what it is to lead loving and faithful lives. Then it becomes easier to celebrate today that Eric and Alma are together again as they were for 59 years on this earth.

My mother pictures it something like this. "Grandma is greeting him now by saying, 'Eric, what took you so long?'"

Grandpa, we love you, we miss you, and we thank you for all you have been to us. Save us a place at the best swimmin' hole in heaven because we want to be with you again.