

A Swary Family Reunion With A Voice From Beyond

Today was Aunt Carol's memorial service. It was really difficult but a very nice way for friends and family to gather to celebrate fond memories and the long, hard fought battle she waged for a remarkable 7 years (even more remarkable knowing that her original diagnosis was 5).

We arrived at the funeral home around 2. After consoling Alicia and Stacy, Mom decided to sit in the most comfortable seat she could find which happened to be in the back corner. By the time the service began at 4.30, the section we sat in turned into a Swary gathering with some very old friends in the mix. I was getting tired of sitting in the rather uncomfortable chairs and Mom and I both decided that it would be nice if I went up front and sat with Diane (one of Carol's close friends and my boss) since she was all alone as her husband had to work. Good chance to pick on her.

Behind us was a woman who has seemingly completely channeled Emily or knows her just as well as I do... or more likely, both. A few weeks ago, Aunt LuAnn commented on my facebook post wishing everyone a Happy New Year by posting "What Would Mrs. Curtis Say?" (kind of like the old bracelets people would wear asking "What Would Jesus Do?"). Today, I was reminded of an escapade I undertook that ended after I exited the Ohio turnpike and came back home. How those two told me to take three months and see where I ended up. Work at McDonald's or some other job and see what happened. I told her that I am not dead yet. Let's see if this brings out some lurkers and you know who you are ☹ ! It was just scary... I swore I heard Emily talking to me in Lu's body.

Back to the service. Just like Emily, Carol had the entire thing planned. Except for a letter written by Alicia that was

so heartwarming that I lost it. Carol fought tooth and nail until her work on Earth was complete. I think the time really came to her final breath when she said she was ready to "go home."

After the service, I had to quickly pull it together as I had to song lead at mass. I was really amazed how well I did. More help from above? It was the end of the Christmas season as the Baptism of the Lord was celebrated. Thus, I sang "Joy to the World," "What Child is This?" and "Go Tell It on the Mountain." Tomorrow following 10.30AM mass, the decorations will be taken down for another year.

So... something to consider while remembering someone who was loved so greatly. Alicia and Stacy both commented how much they loved my previous post. Maybe I can get a few more comments ☐

Boy, Was His Face Red...

I received an interesting email forward today about a letter someone wrote to the editor of The Arizona Republic newspaper. I checked it out on snopes.com to make sure the story was true and not just someone with too much time on their hands making stuff up. The story was true, although the letters that were reprinted in the email had been embellished somewhere during the course of the email forward. Here are the reprints of the letters written to the editor:

A letter to the Editor;

Question of the day for Luke Air Force Base: Whom do we thank for the morning air show?

Last Wednesday, at precisely 9:11 a.m., a tight formation of four F-16 jets made a low pass over Arrowhead Mall, continuing

west over Bell Road at approximately 500 feet. Imagine our good fortune!

Do the Tom Cruise-wannabes feel we need this wake-up call, or were they trying to impress the cashiers at Mervyns' early-bird special?

Any response would be appreciated.

Tom MacRae, Peoria

The correspondent received a response from Col. Robin Rand, commander of Luke AFB's 56th Fighter Wing, in the pages of that same newspaper the following day:

Luke Air Force Base was asked to respond to a letter writer's question about a "morning air show" he observed recently ("A wake-up call from Luke's jets," Letters, Thursday):

The "wake-up call" witnessed the morning of June 15 was a formation of F-16 jets from Luke Air Force Base lining up for a memorial service in Sun City at the gravesite for Air Force Capt. Jeremy Fresques, an officer assigned to Air Force Special Operations. Fresques gave his life in defense of our country while serving in Iraq.

It is unfortunate that at a time when our nation is at war someone would believe we have less than honorable and professional reasons for such a mission.

The commander of the fighter squadron was given the difficult duty of informing the family of Capt. Fresques on Memorial Day that the officer, a husband, son and Arizonan, had died in Iraq.

On behalf of the men and women at Luke Air Force Base, we continue to keep Jeremy and his family in our thoughts and prayers.

Col. Robin Rand

Luke Air Force Base

Four days later, the newspaper also published a response from Lt. Col. Pleus himself:

Regarding "A wake-up call from Luke's jets":

On June 15, at precisely 9:12 a.m., a perfectly timed four-ship of F-16s from the 63rd Fighter Squadron at Luke Air Force Base flew over the grave of Capt Jeremy Fresques.

Capt. Fresques was an Air Force officer who was previously stationed at Luke Air Force Base and was killed in Iraq on May 30, Memorial Day.

At 9 a.m. on June 15, his family and friends gathered at Sunland Memorial Park in Sun City to mourn the loss of a husband, son and friend.

Based on the letter writer's recount of the flyby, and because of the jet noise, I'm sure you didn't hear the 21-gun salute, the playing of taps, or my words to the widow and parents of Capt. Fresques as I gave them their son's flag on behalf of the president of the United States and all those veterans and servicemen and women who understand the sacrifices they have endured.

A four-ship flyby is a display of respect the Air Force pays to those who give their lives in defense of freedom. We are professional aviators and take our jobs seriously, and on June 15 what the letter writer witnessed was four officers lining up to pay their ultimate respects.

The letter writer asks, "Whom do we thank for the morning air show?"

The 56th Fighter Wing will call for you, and forward your thanks to the widow and parents of Capt. Fresques, and thank them for you, for it was in their honor that my pilots flew the most honorable formation of their lives.

Lt. Col. Scott Pleus

Luke Air Force Base

To his credit, the complainant, Mr. MacRae, tendered a written apology which was published in The Republic on 9 July:

*Regarding "Flyby honoring fallen comrade" (Letters, June 28):
I read with increasing embarrassment and humility the response to my unfortunate letter to The Republic concerning an Air Force flyby ("A wake-up call from Luke's jets," Letters, June*

23).

I had no idea of the significance of the flyby, and would never have insulted such a fine and respectful display had I known.

I have received many calls from the fine airmen who are serving or have served at Luke, and I have attempted to explain my side and apologized for any discomfort my letter has caused.

This was simply an uninformed citizen complaining about noise. I have been made aware in both written and verbal communications of the four-ship flyby, and my heart goes out to each and every lost serviceman and woman in this war in which we are engaged.

I have been called un-American by an unknown caller and I feel that I must address that. I served in the U.S. Navy and am a Vietnam veteran. I love my country and respect the jobs that the service organizations are doing.

Please accept my heartfelt apologies.

Tom MacRae, Peoria

Well, anyway, I just thought it was an interesting email forward. And it was thought-provoking and even contained some valuable life lessons: don't jump to conclusions and appreciate everything in life. God Bless our troops!

She Had The Final Word

For anyone who knew Emily Curtis well has at times encountered her fierce, stubborn determination get get things done **HER WAY!!!** Every band show, choir song, organ piece, musical scene everything down to the minutest detail had to meet with her demands. She was the teacher that you either loved or hated but always respected. Her devotion to family, country,

students, everyone she touched was stronger than most; very few could match her will and strength. This profound quality showed in true fashion in the memorial service that she orchestrated herself.

The prelude music was traditional Ma. From the religious to the patriotic to musical theatre to CHRISTMAS? was all there. You heard correctly... Christmas. The woman had Christmas trees in every room of her house every year... yes, even the bathroom. "Silent Night" closed every holiday concert she ever directed. The choir (be it high school, junior high, or elementary) stood in the darkened auditorium with lighted candles and sang all three verses alternating from English lyrics to the traditional German. I also heard "O, Holy Night."

The Broadway pieces also were typical. "You'll Never Walk Alone" from Carousel would fit most funerals and is a regular piece in many church hymnals. I also heard "Edelweiss" from The Sound of Music which was the last lyric that Oscar Hammerstein II wrote. I was half expecting to hear the guitar opening the overture of Jesus Christ Superstar, but must have come in late.

On to the service itself. I'm sure that Emily chose each reading herself. However, the point that drove the whole thing home was Amanda's "Time of Remembrance." Her mother asked her to deliver it.. they did everything together. At the end of her delivery, Amanda took out a micro-cassette player and pushed "Play." then, Emily's voice filled the church as she told of her love of family, country, and large support group. She ever joked about her need to have the final word. She never gave up her battle with leukemia. The doctors and nurses at the James Center on the OSU campus were all amazed at her fortitude. They dubbed her either "princess" or "general." They knew her well, too. Unfortunately, the disease finally defeated her.

The music played during the service was also quite unusual for most... but not for Ma's. A violinist played "Carmen Ohio" (the Ohio State alma mater). Although she was a graduate of Miami University of Ohio, Emily was a traditional Buckeye... she bled Scarlet and Grey.

Following the internment service, a large number of people returned to the church to celebrate and remember Emily. Teachers... remarkably who found subs for the day (probably 15 total), family, friends shared some personal memories. My mother told me that we had until 1.45 because she had to get back to drive the school bus. I can honestly say that I am a stronger person because my life has been touched by Emily and her typical lunch of fat-free pringles or honey mustard pretzels and her can of Diet Coke (I would not want to be around her if she did not have her can of Diet Coke). So many great, profound, life-affirming memories that will last forever. **THANK YOU MA, I LOVE YOU...SON2.**

Ordinary People

One of my favorite quotes has always been one for which I have no idea for whom credit should go: "Heroes are ordinary people who make bad decisions at good moments." Surely with my wide-ranging blog someone must have a good idea from what source this comes from. I have thought long and hard for several years and have come up with nada.

Today, I was fortunate to attend a memorial service for a man who could be seen as a hero in the eyes of many in the very small community I was raised in. I know of at least one individual who considered Mr. Peverly their personal hero, my Uncle Bob.

The memorial service was a bit unusual. The atmosphere was very light and dare I say, fun. The Elementary School gymnasium was adorned with pictures of high school sports teams, trophies, and a batting cage. Over the speakers, music from the 1950s played ("Yakety-Yak," "Rock Around the Clock," etc.) Far from the slow, sober music one might expect for a funeral.

Mr. Peverly taught high school math from 1956-1988. He was perhaps better known as the coach of baseball, basketball, and cross country. Unfortunately, he retired from teaching one year before I entered high school. I did however have him as a substitute for French class; which he told us he knew absolutely nothing about. A good thing for him it was mid-term exam day.

Mr. Peverly and my uncle have had a very long, interesting relationship. My Grandfather Swary passed away when Uncle Bob was 15 years old... years before either of my older brothers were born and before my parents were married. Being the youngest of 3 (and the only boy), Bob needed the guidance of a male figure. Because he saw in Bob someone who was more inclined toward sports than classroom studies, Mr. Peverly took him under his wing and nurtured him into the man he is today.

As one of the three speakers at the service, Uncle Bob told one very interesting story from his youth (one my entire family knows by memory). It seems that during his senior year, the varsity baseball team lost the Regional finals game 2-1. That night, Uncle Bob and some teammates decided to go and "Break some training rules." They went out and got drunk. The next day, Robert was called to Coach Peverly's office where he was asked (with his mother beside him) if he indeed did "break training." Since Coach was one of the few people he could not lie to, Bob confessed. Punishment included sitting out the rest of the season (there were still regular season games left to be played) and being ineligible for MVP honors (for which

he was sure to win and was even scouted by the KC Royals ballteam). Years later, Coach Peverly went to Uncle Bob's house with the MVP award.

Everyone has a hero who they either looked up to in their youth or someone they continue to look to for inspiration. It was very comforting to see someone I have grown to respect give tribute to one of his heroes.

And to prove I do have some prowess in math Mr. Peverly taught math for 32 years at one school. If only he had stayed another 4 years. He must have known there was another Shaffer boy coming and ran.