

Meditations On The Life Of Bob Arehart

Kurt Arehart - 2017

When a man and a woman have lived almost 70 fine years together, it is difficult to speak of one without the other. Today we celebrate a life well lived, and at the same time an extraordinary marriage, filled with kindness and generosity, encompassing so many good works.

Bob and Helen in their youth brought their fine stones together and crafted a foundation. With passing years the fit of the stones grew ever better, ever more sound, the seams needing little or no mortar. And this finely made foundation made more of Bob and Helen than they might have been apart. This strength allowed each to reach further, do more good, than either could have done alone.

Bob was able to serve St James Lutheran Church and many professional engineering societies so well because Helen delivered a solid home life, freeing Bob to devote time and energy outside the home. Helen also aided this work, quietly typing, filing, organizing.

Helen was able to provide deep support to many family members and others in need because Bob provided stable income and unwavering emotional support, giving Helen the platform from which to serve so generously.

Bob was strong enough to reject base notions of manhood and bring gentle kindness to all his relationships. He met Helen with full respect, treating her as a full and equal partner, even though they were of the single earner model so common then. A man ahead of his time both in how he chose his life partner, and how he treated her. He showed us how to be the best kind of man. True manhood.

I was in 5th grade at Fox Chase Elementary and had been sent on an errand by my teacher. The gym teacher heard my footsteps in the stairwell, and shouted a deep and booming challenge to this probable transgression. I was so startled that I actually pissed myself. Why? I had no experience in being yelled at. This was never our way. Bob and Helen were always calm and quiet in their marriage and their parenting.

In this same year Bob was driving me home from a church function one evening when car trouble forced us to limp into a Frankford garage. Two salty mechanics leaned over the engine casually throwing bemused F-bombs all over the place. Roughly 3 per sentence. At age 10 I was most impressed by such a display of rough-and-ready manhood, and felt embarrassed and disappointed because my dad did not match this vulgarity and show himself a “real man” like those grease monkeys. Dad was far more interested in modeling the strong, quiet way of true manhood. I loved him for that... and I learned.

A few years later I got caught up in some pretty serious trouble in a church-based youth group. The fallout was also pretty serious and had the potential to impact Bob & Helen’s social status and standing in the church community. Even then, under considerable social pressure, they handled the trouble with gentle patience, paying more attention to my well-being than the damage they may be taking. I loved him for that... and I learned.

And a few years after that, as I was just a few days into my learner’s permit, I crossed a wire in my inexperienced driver-brain, mashed the gas instead of the brake, and piloted Bob’s brand new Kingswood Estate wagon, all 400 cubic inches of powerful fury, cleanly through the garage door. Mom was along for the ride, and sat speechless, a rarity. Dad set about working with me to free the car from the mousetrap the shattered garage door had become. He knew I had learned all that I could from the experience, and that a display of rage would help nothing.

I loved him for that... and I learned.

As I approached age 30 I saw around me broken, unattractive marriages, lacking in honesty and mutual respect, and despaired of ever finding a life partner to form a marriage like the one Bob and Helen modeled for us. But I knew what a great marriage looked like, and I found the strength to wait, to not settle for less.

I had learned. And I loved him for that.

Dad taught me

- Care with money, yet generosity to folks in need
- Careful planning, yet a sense of fun and adventure
- Gentle loving parenting, yet with clear, earned authority
- Serious stewardship for home and equipment, yet freedom from obsession over the collecting of shiny toys and ostentatious living.
- Steadfast unconditional love of family, yet openness to new ideas, new ways of being.
- A sense of playfulness and humor, yet a serious regard for the feelings of others and a deep sense of personal responsibility.
- Deep duty to family, yet a strong sense of responsibility to the community.

In short, a beautiful sense of balance in all things.

Bob Arehart was my kind of man. And I loved him deeply for it. And always will.