



RC (ARKIE) SMITH JUNE 6, 1933-DE19, 2009
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“TIMBER!” one might have been able to hear as RC “Arkie” Smith laid low another tree right there between those other trees. Most of you know how he could drop a tree on a dime. That’s what his family shared with me as they talked with joy about him. In the kitchen of his home, around the table where some of you have perhaps sat, Dorthy and their kids Pam, Rick, Julie and granddaughter Rachel beamed when they talked about a husband who provided many things, a father who loved his family, and a granddaughter who a few moments ago spoke for her siblings about their grandfather. They beamed with pride and joy remembering times of the past and things present where they saw RC’s accomplishments. They beamed with pride sharing how dad cut the tree that was made into the new front door of the Lincoln home in Springfield, the door that son Rick made from that tree. So if you did not know that, then when you take your visitors to Springfield and to Lincoln’s home you can all beam with pride as you tell your visitors you knew the man who chopped the tree down and the son who built the door. Isn’t that interesting? From one tree cutter or log splitter, that is old Abe Lincoln, to

another logger, Arkie Smith, they had something in common. Maybe Arkie is swapping cutting techniques with old Abe. They beamed with pride recounting how he cleared timber for some of the roads built around here, and the work he did at New Salem State Park. The list goes on, too numerous to mention here. But ask them I bet they would love to tell RC's story.

The family shared how Arkie grew up in Arkansas in a place called Palestine. That's where God knitted RC together in his mother's womb, with 3 brothers and 5 sisters, a family of 9. God gave him the gifts that continued to grow. God gave him the gift of loving the outdoors, being among his creations, to understand what could become of the trees, how they could be used for homes, furniture and much more. Back in Arkansas they were surrounded by big woods, which helped RC and his brother to make a living by cutting down the trees hauling them off to the sawmill. When hearing the story my mind thought, "Well here is a modern day Paul Bunyon." He climbed trees, topped them off and learned to fell a tree so close that it would drop between a row of trees with no problem. They added that he could walk the timbers and know what they were worth to the person who owned the land, and for his own gain. And he made a comfortable living at it for his family where they could enjoy many things. He worked cutting trees right up to a few years ago when his failing health began to get the best of him and it was time to take a breather from the work he loved. I

heard Rick tell someone sometimes he was cutting down a tree and out came a coon. RC kept a big piece of wood along side of him so if a coon was found he could bop him and though I didn't get the whole story, I heard in those days coons went for \$15 a pop. And who couldn't use an extra \$15? Or was that just one of those RC stories?

And of course he met and married Dorothy and raised three wonderful children, Pam, Rick and Julie who intern gave him granddaughter Rachel, grandsons Jordan, Taylor and Tanner. They moved north when Pam was a little over a year old to the land of Lincoln where he stopped when he saw a sawmill and where he got a job doing what he knew best, working with his hands and with wood.

A woodcutter! Most people would think a person was nuts to do something like that. But I was told people in Williamsville have stood in awe of what he accomplished with a chain saw. They were mesmerized as a tree would come toppling down without scratching another house. He loved it! I bet he would even bet to just about how many inches he would come to his predicted drop.

He loved working in the timbers so much Dorothy told me he would sometimes take the whole family with him, have a picnic and some solid family time as he cut one tree after the other, and then have to figure a way to get them to the sawmill. Rick remembers going with dad when he was older and helping him,

watching with awe as his dad did his thing. They would rest awhile under the protection of some of those trees as they took a breather and they ate their lunch and sat a spell before they got back to the task. Rick became the one who would build things while dad did the grunt work. But God blessed both to see what could result from a tree that stood in a forest.

You see, many of you know this, RC was a hard worker. He worked long and hard and hardly missed a day of work. Didn't matter if there was snow on the ground or cold, or the sun was as hot as it could be, he went to work. Rick told me that one winter's day it was so cold that when he came home his hands were white as the snow he had been working in. His hands were so cold that he had to prior his fingers open. Next day, back at it again.

But it wasn't all work for RC. He had time to enjoy his family. He enjoyed his grandkids. He loved to talk with them and encourage them to do their best no matter what they were doing. They remember how funny he was. They said most of you knew of his humor. He always made people laugh. Once you met him, you would never forget him. He had the type of personality that others were drawn too. He was well liked in the community by just about everyone. He worked for the community, for the church and for his friends and his family. They say he was larger than life, people knew when RC stepped into the room.

I did not have the opportunity to know RC for a long period of time, though I did hear some of the members of our church talk about him. I saw him at our dinners and all that but didn't get to know him very well, now I wish I had. I'd loved to listen to him speak. But I enjoyed those visits we did have. Carole and I enjoyed going to their home to have lunch and sit around the cozy kitchen table eating and getting to know one another. And I remember the last time, a few weeks ago when RC was getting worse, I stopped by to visit, found he was having a bad day, stayed a little while, had prayer with him and I asked God to ease his pain, to bless the rest of his days on this earth and to show him His Grace and mercy. Saturday that prayer was answered.

I read Scripture today that talks about time. There is a time to be born, and there comes a time to die. We think of the birth of anyone as a joyous thing but we fear the other, death. But I am here this morning to tell you that we don't have to fear death at all. Death is just a vehicle that takes us back to God. Death is the door to eternal life with God. Jesus was born, died, and rose again so that we might not have to fear death. Jesus has gone to prepare a place for all who believe in him. What RC is enjoying now is a place where there is no more pain nor sorrow, nor tears, nor death nor separation.

In just a few days we will celebrate the birth of God's Son, Jesus, the Christ. The angels proclaimed to the shepherds that "today in Bethlehem the Savior has

been born.” God’s promise has come true. What was told years before now has happened. And that which happened over 2000 years ago affects what we are doing today, for that same Jesus, is the same Jesus that loves us and loved RC. That same Jesus who died to set the world free of its sins, died for one RC William Smith. This same Jesus opened the doors to heaven this past Saturday to welcome home a man who had fought the good fight and was ready to rest from his labors. His fight is over. His pain is gone. He is worry free.

So you see why today we celebrate the life of RC. Oh, not just what he did here, but now he has gone to be with God, to receive that which God has ready for him.

I asked his family to give me a few words to describe RC and they said, hard worker, caring, charismatic, and funny. They also said RC would always give his opinion on things. Not that he was always right, but well, 99% of the time. Why he even made up words. And then some of you know him best for his wit and his stories, or as they have come to be known, his “Arkieisms.” Quaint stories that could be fact or fiction. Like the stories from his Arkansas days sitting around a cold pot belly stove betting on who knows what, perhaps how long before the first puff of smoke could be seen, or his stories of shooting dice on a stump from a tree he had cut down or betting on who knows what, just about everything.

And by the way most of you would say, along with his family he loved to gamble. That was part of him as well. You name it he would gamble on it. He would gamble on which way the wind would blow, or if it would blow at all. And out here are perhaps some of those people whom he gambled with. And I'm sure there are those poker players as well, who often sat around the kitchen table and played poker into the wee hours of the morning. The kids remember when they were young that you could tell who was winning that night because when they served the goodies the big winner would tip the best. But you know he never missed work though he stayed up playing cards.

Sometimes we might say life is a gamble. RC wasn't afraid to take a gamble when he married a young Dorothy and moved his family to new surroundings away from family. That was a good gamble. Look what he did. He wasn't afraid to stop on his way to get a job at Caterpillar and check out a sawmill that he just happened to come across. Again he was winner as he landed eventually in Williamsville and became your friend. He wasn't afraid to gamble to tell the boss he knew how to run a saw in the sawmill though he didn't, but he knew he could learn so he got the job. He wasn't afraid to begin his own business of tree cutting when perhaps he could have gone on to do other things. In these things too, he was a winner. In the eyes of his family he is a winner. He taught them how to live. He taught them how

to deal with difficulties. He rolled the dice, played the cards that were dealt him and now rests from his labors.

That's the story of RC better known around these parts as "Arkie" Smith, woodcutter extraordinaire, as told to me by his family. They are proud that he was part of their lives and for the values that he instilled in them, and how he taught them to love life, have fun, be honest, work hard and take care of family and always have a smile on your face.

Remember I said there was a time for everything? Well there is a time to bring this message to a close. Scripture says there is a time to die and a time to mourn. We are in that process. But it also says there is a time to laugh and a time to dance. We've laughed some I hope, we've cried some certainly way down deep in our soul, and the dancing will come later perhaps. But we also know there is a time to say farewell to a husband, brother, dad, grandfather and friend. But hopefully we don't say goodbye, but just, see you later RC. Enjoy your new home, rejoice and be free as a bird able to fly in those heavenly forests checking out those heavenly trees God might need for the next mansion that needs to be built for the other people who will be coming home. And who knows, maybe he will be the heavenly lumberjack that will be cutting your heavenly trees one day as God begins to prepare your house for your homecoming.

And guess what. Arkie is going to be able to celebrate his first Christmas with Jesus face to face. With all the angels in heaven he can help recount the Christmas story as it is remembered in heaven as we remember Christ's birth down here on earth. "For unto us is born the Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

Do you hear what I hear? Listen closely....I heard it again. I think I hear the sound of a tree falling. Is that RC's voice yelling "TIMBER?" I bet he just felled his first tree in heaven. And I bet it fell straight and in just the precise place he wanted. Anyone want to take that bet? I guess Arkie is already at his new job in heaven....and sorry fellows, I really don't think God has a poker night... But then again....God can do anything. But then God who knows all things will always be the big winner. Sorry guys!

See you later, Arkie. Till we meet again may the Grace of God surround us with the hope of this Christmas Season knowing that through the birth of his Son God has opened to all who believe in him the gates to eternal life.