

EULOGY FOR PHIL GINGERICH

read by Jon Morningstar

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Grandpa loved to tell us stories, and he had wonderful stories to tell; stories of days of old; stories that seem so long ago, another place, another time, another life even. But it was his life, and he would dive deep into his sharp memory to share with us a snapshot of that life on the farm, in the Army, on the playing field or driving in a car.

Whenever Grandpa told a chapter of his story, a smile would form on his lips and a wistful look would be in his eyes. It was like he stepped back into time, and allowed us the privilege of being part of that memory. His memories were important to him, and so they became important to us. Almost always, after he would start telling a story, he would stop and tell us that we probably didn't want to hear these old boring stories. We would then coax him into continuing, even though we probably had heard it many times before. It would be a brief pause in the moment, and then we'd be back off on that journey down memory lane with him.

He liked to tell stories about his days running track; about the fastest times he ran; details about the types of tracks he ran on; things he remembered about the guys he ran against. Being fast was a gift that he valued very highly. Whenever he talked about watching me play football he would always tell me that "I was the fastest one on the field." And even though it wasn't even close to being true, it was the greatest compliment he could give me.

He would describe life on the farm in Buda, Illinois and the work that he did and who he worked for.

He told us of his memories of serving in the Army, and how he never had to go to battle in World War 2 because he blew out his knee sliding into second base while playing recreational softball against the base Army officers. He loved playing softball against the officers because it was the only time where he, as an enlisted soldier, could hit an officer. And yes, on that famous slide into second base he did take down an officer.

That was a life changing slide for many reasons. If he hadn't injured his leg at that moment in time, he wouldn't have been able to meet the woman who would become his wife. Even though he wasn't supposed to fraternize with the officer nurses, some of Grandpa's favorite stories were telling us about his pursuit of Grandma. How he won her heart, despite all the efforts of the men around him also trying to woo the beautiful Army nurse.

From my grandfather and his stories I learned many things. One of life's biggest decisions is marriage, and from Grandpa I learned to marry the right woman for the right reasons. That even if you're dating someone glamorous, like the Comiskey girl he dated in Chicago who got him great tickets to White Sox games, that the right woman is going to be the person who will stay with you the rest of your lives; who will make a good mother to your children; who will make you a better person. He always said of Grandma, "She made an honest man out of me."

I also learned the value of money management and why it's important to live within your means. He didn't set himself up to be a good role model; he just chose to be wise with his money, not to spend it frivolously. To give to those in need, and to be smart about where you're investing.

In some of his stories, I even had a part. Such as our family vacation to Chicago back in 2001. We visited many of his old stomping grounds. He showed us around Fort Sheridan - an old army base where he was stationed, that has since become a residential community. He showed us the apartment where he and Grandma got married. It was impressive how well he still knew all the roads of downtown Chicago, and where to turn and where we were. We had our very own historic tour guide, even though he was legally blind.

He revealed his adventurous spirit during the times that he spent us. He was always willing to try new things. He willingly went to any restaurant with us, and he would eat the different kinds of foods like sushi or raw fish that we'd put in front of him.

And now, with his passing, Grandpa ends the final chapter of his life on Earth. He completed his life's story with faithfulness, humility, integrity and kindness. Being a man of character remains an underlying theme in his story, one that I am honored to share and to be part of. His is a legacy of a strong Christian faith, commitment to the Lord, and knowledge and understanding of God's truths from the Bible. He loved his family and worked hard to provide for his wife and children. He loved all of his grandchildren and he genuinely cared about what and how we are doing in life.

Some of you would look at the whole story of Grandpa Phil's life, and concisely describe him as "a good man." And that he was. But, I will remember him for so much more. I will remember the various chapters of his story that he shared over many years spending quality time with my family. And I will remember that he made sure to let me know that he loved me through his words of affirmation. Grandpa Phil spoke to my heart man-to-man and for that I will always be thankful.