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In Memory of Uncle Arnie

By Karl Arnold Belser

I am Karl Belser, and my mother, Wilma, was Arnold Beckman's sister.

Mom adored her brother Arnie and wanted each of her three sons, Steve, Larry and me, to be like him. Uncle Arnie profoundly influenced each of our lives.

My father supported Mom's efforts to shape us in Uncle Arnie's image because high tech fascinated him. Dad was a professor of architecture and later director of planning for Santa Clara County, which became Silicon Valley. None of us became architects, but Larry and I became PhD scientists.

I was born in 1940, and a photo taken shortly after my birth shows Mom and Dad standing opposite Uncle Arnie and Aunt Mabel. Mom appears to be presenting me to Uncle Arnie.

Of course, I remember nothing of this first meeting, but looking at the picture I can imagine Mom thinking, "This little baby is going to grow up to be famous just like you." As first son, my parents named me Karl Arnold Belser, Karl after Dad and Arnold after Uncle Arnie.

Uncle Arnie visited us frequently in our home in Campbell. I remember him as a tall man dressed in a crisp white shirt with slacks and shiny shoes. Even in those early days he was bald with a fringe of gray hair around the sides.

Uncle Arnie loved to play the piano, and I used to stand beside him as he played ragtime tunes. I admired his ability, which motivated me to learn to play.

Uncle Arnie rarely talked about his business when he visited. He preferred to talk politics with Mom. Mom was an avid Democrat and Uncle Arnie a Republican, so the discussions were lively. I remember stories about Kruschew's visit to the US in 1959 and about Nixon's campaign to become governor of California.

I graduated from high school in 1957, and I only applied to Cal Tech. After all, Uncle Arnie was the Chairman of the board, and I was sure I would be admitted. I wasn't because I hadn't done well enough on the Scholastic

Aptitude Test. I ended up scrambling to get into San Jose State at the last minute. I gave up on Cal Tech after that, and transferred to Stanford where I received my degrees.

I always kept my parents informed of my progress in school but never talked to Uncle Arnie about my education. Both of my brothers worked for the Beckman Spinco division in Palo Alto, but I choose to work for IBM as a co-op student instead. I set my course independently of Uncle Arnie; at least I thought I had.

In 1967 my thesis advisor was on sabbatical in Europe when I completed my doctoral dissertation, and I couldn't get him to read it. I complained to Mom, and the next thing I knew the professor who had been acting for my advisor came into my office and said, "I didn't know that your uncle was Arnold Beckman. The Stanford president just called and told me that your thesis has been signed."

I was embarrassed, so I questioned Mom, who said, "Oh yes, I keep Uncle Arnie informed about you boys, and I did mention the problems you were having getting your thesis signed."

Uncle Arnie's interest surprised me, but I didn't find out the whole story until Mom died in 1984. I found a letter from Uncle Arnie saying, in essence, "I'm enclosing

the check for Karl's tuition and dorm expenses for his second year at Stanford. I again ask you to please never mention my assistance to Karl. I want him to receive the satisfaction that I got when I was young and making my way."

Now the pieces fell into place. Uncle Arnie had always acted in my best interest. He hadn't intervened to get me into Cal Tech for my own good. He had watched my progress through Mom's eyes, and no wonder he talked to the Stanford president those many years ago. He insured that my education was completed.

I went to work for IBM, and I never considered working for Beckman Instruments. I managed to become successful in my own right, and I feel satisfied for having done it without the influence of an powerful relative.

I think that my experience of growing up in the shadow of this great man was amazingly constructive, and I'm thankful for Uncle Arnie's wisdom.

The End