

RECOLLECTIONS OF MY UNCLE ARNIE

By Karl Arnold Belser

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I woke up this morning, Easter Sunday, and remembered that I promised my cousin Pat that I would write a few of my recollections about my uncle Arnie. It is one week before my uncle's 99th birthday. The truth is that Uncle Arnie has been a great influence on my life. I have never had an occasion until now to thank him.

But who am I? I am Karl Arnold Belser. My mother, Wilma, was Arnold Beckman's sister. She was three years younger than Arnold, and Arnold was her idol by which everything was measured. I was named after my father and my uncle.

The first thing that I knew about my uncle Arnie was that he was a kind, modest man despite his wealth and success. He was also a people person and went to great efforts to keep in contact with all the diverse members of his family. So I knew my uncle from his periodic visits.

I must admit that as a child I was most impressed by Uncle Arnie's ability to play the piano. He loved to play the piano and played in our home many times. My mother told me often that music would be something that would give me enjoyment during my whole life, no matter what my circumstance. I saw this fact with my mother who wasn't rich, and I saw it with my uncle who was. This message motivated me to learn to play the piano.

I am an engineer and I enjoy knowing how things work and inventing new things. The association that I have with this motivation is a story told to me by my mother. Uncle Arnie, however, does not remember this and you may see why. As a child of about ten, my mother received a German cuckoo clock as a present. This clock fascinated Arnold and he was determined to find out how it worked, so he took it apart. Of course clocks have springs and gears and are in general pretty delicate and complicated. Much to my mother's sadness, he could not get the clock back together again. Now you might wonder why I should share this apparently negative story. You have to understand that technical people are obsessed to their core with the quest to know why and how things work. This is the essential character required for creativity and invention. This, to me, was a clue to Uncle Arnie's success.

Another clue is illustrated by the following story. When Uncle Arnie was a teenager he was the leader of a band in which he played piano. He left home and went to Idaho, as I remember it, where he played piano in a silent movie theater. The mode of transportation he used was to "ride the rail" which means to steal a ride by hanging onto the supporting member under a boxcar. Now the Belser boys, Steve, Larry and I, knew this story very well. It represented the ultimate great adventure that a young person could experience. Note that uncle Arnie's adventure happened some time in the second decade of this century, but my brother Larry took this story seriously, and as a teenager in the late 50's, started to ride the rail from San Jose to Eugene, Oregon. The railroad police apprehended him in Red Bluff. I offer this story as evidence of the profound effect that Uncle Arnie had. Larry is still very adventuresome. For example, he immigrated to New Zealand where he has an Oracle Systems consulting business.

Larry and I both have PhD degrees, in microbiology and electrical engineering respectively. It was just understood, that is, via my mother's words and actions, that we would be like uncle Arnie and get advanced degrees. This was a significant problem for my brother, Steve,

because he was less academically inclined. However, he tried.

When I graduated from high school I assumed that I would go to Cal Tech. After all my uncle was the chairman of the board of directors. I had applied nowhere else. I applied and was rejected. I had to scramble to get admitted to San Jose State College about a month before school started. This was when I decided to take responsibility for myself, and Uncle Arnie wisely gave me this responsibility by not interceding. I subsequently applied to Stanford and was admitted.

This next story relates to this quest for education. Larry, Steve and I were all in college at the same time. Larry and Steve were at Berkeley and I was at Stanford. I did not think much about the cost of this education until my mother died about 15 years ago. She kept some letters that, unfortunately, I threw away. I found a private letter to my mother in which it was clear that Uncle Arnie was helping my father and mother pay for our education. This was a complete surprise to me because it was never Uncle Arnie's practice to interfere in other people's lives, much less in their financial lives.

The last story I will tell is about the only time in which I knew that Uncle Arnie did intervene on my behalf,

and much to my embarrassment. Professor Bernie Widrow was my thesis advisor at Stanford. He was a wheeler-dealer who had about thirty graduate students working for him on three government contracts in a two level management hierarchy. His lieutenants were literally lieutenants in the Navy who were Annapolis graduates. I was having a hard time getting my thesis written so that I could graduate. Fortunately for me Professor Widrow took a one-year Sabbatical in Europe and I wrote my thesis. But I was having communications problems in getting Professor Widrow to read and sign the thesis. I complained to my mother about my frustrations. The next thing I knew, the president of Stanford had interceded at Uncle Arnie's request, my thesis got signed, and I graduated.

I have much to be thankful for in my relationship to Uncle Arnie. He has led and still is leading by example. I love and admire him greatly.

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