

**FAREWELL TO MY FATHER, GORDON LESLIE BELNAP**  
**Saturday, 19 June 2021**

**The Influence of a Father**

On behalf of Brian's and my families and Gordon's wife Sharon, I wish to thank you for coming today to honor the life of our father, grandfather, and companion, Gordon Leslie Belnap.

While fathers are often given short shrift, I believe their influence is as deep and long-lasting in its own way as that of mothers. Dad clearly belonged to the school of thought that "the best thing a man can put on his crops or his kids is his own shadow." Growing up, I felt blessed to be born in the best family in the best location in the best church on earth. While my conviction of the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ hopefully hasn't waned, I've subsequently learned that our family was pretty normal and that others can feel as intensely grateful for their roots as I am of mine. Still, that sense of life as something "special" I ascribe to the influence of my father.

Dad directly influenced three of my top passions—photography, family history, and travel. Because Dad served during the Korean War as a U.S. Army photographer, we grew up with cameras. Because Dad served as president of the Belnap Family Organization and edited the publication *Belnap Family Crier*, I followed in his footsteps. Because Dad took many business trips back East when I was younger, Dad awakened in me a love for New York City—which later became our home for 26 years—and of the larger world.

Other favorite things I trace directly to Dad: long drives in "the country," family gatherings, stuffed pork chops for birthday dinner, a tidy yard, Utah's red rock country, backyard grilled hamburgers, an interest in Finland where he served his mission (and where we visited shortly after we moved to Russia and met a woman he baptized 61 years earlier), fresh cherries, and trying to make crystal water goblets "sing" with your finger.

I am grateful for many happy childhood memories, such as watching the Christmas Parade that used to be held in downtown Ogden while riding on Dad's shoulders, getting squirted with a hose in the back yard, and camping at Mirror Lake and Monte Cristo. Later, after I moved away for school and work, our personal interactions obviously lessened. One silver lining from the recent pandemic has been weekly Sunday family Zoom calls that included Dad and Sharon.

Dad expressly instructed that our remarks focus not on his achievements—and there are many—nor on his faults—which he worked hard to try to overcome—but rather on lessons we learned because he lived. I wish to briefly highlight how Dad influenced my life for the better through his examples of hard work, commitment to principle, unheralded generosity, and endurance through adversity:

**Hard Work**

Through personal example, Dad modeled better than anyone else I know the importance and joy of hard work. He always urged us to show initiative and "gumption," to "dive in" and not be

afraid to try new things. Dad often recited the maxim: “There are three types of people in the world: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who wonder what happened.” And he was never reticent in letting us know what type of person he expected us to be—to be doers and not mere spectators.

Dad built chicken coops, painted houses, delivered newspapers, washed dishes, picked cherries, and scrubbed cannery vats. After he left Commercial Security Bank, he, with the help of Mom, built two businesses—U.S. Mortgage Company and Mortgage Computer Associates. In the process, he converted the old Ogden Bowling Alley into an office complex, Boulevard Plaza at 2650 Washington Boulevard. Dad loved working at our cabin near Eden in Ogden Valley.

Dad had us work, too, although I’m sure he thought that we never worked in our childhoods as hard as he did in his. Still, he had us paint stripes at the old Belnap Lumber Company parking lot on lower 24<sup>th</sup> Street, clean and repair other homes that he rented out, and weed and mow the lawn. Dad taught us the importance of getting an early start to the day, tackling our Saturday morning chores, saving and preparing financially, balancing a checkbook, and sticking to a budget. He taught me about the stock market, the time value of money, and, not least, providing for one’s family. Dad’s expectations of us were always high and clear.

Although Dad knew how to work hard, he also knew how to have fun. After a long day on the water and hiking at Lake Powell, we would lay out on the top level of our houseboat, the “Funship,” watching the stars come out as bats darted overhead. Dad would put in an 8-track tape of Tabernacle Choir music. He would tear up listening to the Choir’s rendition of “You’ll Never Walk Alone.” I later understood how he internalized the lyrics to his own life:

*When you walk through a storm / Hold your head up high / And don't be afraid of the dark  
At the end of a storm / There's a golden sky / And the sweet silver song of a lark  
Walk on through the wind / Walk on through the rain / Though your dreams be tossed and  
blown / Walk on, walk on / With hope in your heart / And you'll never walk alone / You'll  
never walk alone*

Other highlights included a family trip to Mexico City in 1972 for the International Lions Club Convention when Dad was serving as President of the Ogden Lions Club, a flight over Ogden for my birthday that he piloted, and many family vacations at Yellowstone—where his family often went when he was a boy. Later, when I was living in New York City, my parents came to visit several times. On one of their trips, I took them to see “Les Miserables” on Broadway. Dad fell in love with the story—again, I think, because he could see in the plot something of himself.

### **Loyalty and Commitment to Principle**

Dad was loyal—to the Church, our country, and family. He habitually gave his business to or hired family members. He took care of his employees. He didn’t shrink from expressing his opinions. He was willing to stick his neck out on issues that he cared about—sometimes to great ridicule and hostility from neighbors, fellow ward members, and even family. He was fiercely loyal to his hometown of Ogden, often writing letters trying to promote the city’s comeback after decades of decline. Dad was forward-thinking, a natural leader equally comfortable conducting

the ward choir, teaching the Teachers Quorum, or coaching as a missionary the Finnish national Olympic basketball team as he was hosting a users' conference or negotiating a business deal. Active on numerous civic organizations and community boards, Dad was a doer.

### **Unheralded Generosity**

Unusually capable in mortgage banking and business generally, due to occasional setbacks he made, lost, and remade his financial portfolio several times over. He also had special compassion for those less fortunate. He was generous with family and strangers with his personal resources for which he never sought praise or attention. I believe his personal drive was never about money, but rather about having means to help others. He assisted financially several of our great aunts in their later years, and made substantial donations to various causes, including the Church's family-to-family Book of Mormon Project and the Boys Scouts of America. I can't count the number of people who, after learning that Gordon Belnap was my father, have expressed appreciation for his meaningful financial help, quiet mentoring, or sage advice.

### **Overcoming Adversity and Enduring**

Shortly before starting 6<sup>th</sup> Grade, Dad fell out of a tree and seriously hurt his head, an experience that noticeably affected his memory. He ended up missing much of the school year and for the rest of grade school always felt behind. He later described that experience as a blessing, as it caused him to work extra-hard to perform in school and, later, in business.

For those who have known our family a long time, you will understand when I say that, while Dad was a remarkable man with great talents and abilities, he also confronted at various times some strong headwinds and deep personal challenges. In recent years, in addition to more frequently expressing his love, Dad would also quietly apologize for certain "dumb mistakes" (his words) for choices that affected our family. In more reflective moments, he would express sincere regret, how he wished he had done things differently or could redo parts of the past.

Yet, to my father's credit, he never gave up! True, after digging himself into a hole, he could still find a way of digging it yet deeper, but he always kept going. He always kept trying. When you think of Gordon Belnap, I would ask that you remember his example of getting up—again and again—in enduring to the end. He died—or, as he referred to it, "graduated" to the next stage—with a current temple recommend. He died, or has graduated, with the undying love of his children and grandchildren. We appreciate Sharon's assistance for Gordon in his later years with various health challenges, including the cancer that ultimately took him.

### **Final Days**

Last Thanksgiving, Dad wrote: "I am grateful and proud of my two sons Brian and Brent, their lovely wives, my ten grandchildren, their spouses, and my three great grandchildren (soon to be four). I am pleased they all have a testimony of Jesus Christ and are active members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."

On April 13<sup>th</sup> we learned that Dad had been diagnosed the day before with metastatic cancer that was spreading rapidly, and that he had only a few months, at most, left to live. Upon receiving this news, I immediately flew from Ghana to Utah where I was privileged to spend a wonderful “farewell” week-plus with him. Informing us of his terminal diagnosis, Dad wrote: “All is working out well. I have had a great life. Some up and some down. I feel good about it all. I have been blessed, but mostly with great family that I am so proud of. All is well.”

In reply, Dad’s youngest grandchild, our son Nathan, now 14, wrote:

*Hey Grandpa, I heard the news today, and I want to express how much I love you! You are a truly amazing person, and I love listening to your stories. The whole family is devastated to hear that you most likely won’t be able to stick around for much longer. In one of your previous emails, I loved how you used the word “graduating.” The way you are so content in your current situation is a testament to me of how faithful you are in Heavenly Father’s plan for you. I truly cannot thank you enough for how your example has changed my life, and it has! Thank you for being a brilliant person, father, grandfather, and friend. I know that if I don’t see you in the next week or so [and he didn’t—Rebecca and Nathan arrived in Utah from Africa on Monday, 3 days too late], I will see you again someday. I cannot put it into words the gratitude I have just to know you! I love you so much, Nathan*

Although I am very sad about Dad’s passing, I also feel deep peace and happiness, knowing that he is now experiencing many grand reunions: with his firstborn child, our oldest brother Alan, who was born in 1953 and died two hours later while Dad was serving in Korea and whom he therefore never saw, beside whom he will be buried later today—a reunion 68 years in the making; with his mother and father who passed away 49 and 47 years ago, respectively; with our mother who passed away 9 years ago; and with our brother Steven who died 8 years ago; along with all of his siblings and their spouses, and many close friends.

President Spencer W. Kimball taught: “It is important for us . . . to cultivate in our own family a sense that we belong together eternally, that whatever changes outside our home, there are fundamental aspects of our relationship which will never change.” (“Ocean Currents and Family Influences,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1974, pp. 112-13.)

I am grateful to know that there is a God, that He knows and loves each of us, that He has a plan that includes Dad and all of us being with family again in a more glorious state. I am grateful for Jesus Christ, who lived and died to atone, not only for our own sins and shortcomings, but for all losses, pains, voids, deficits, illnesses, ailments, sorrows, disappointments, defeats, crushed hopes—spiritual, physical, mental, or emotional. He is my Hope, my Rock, my Redeemer. I am grateful I was born of goodly parents who loved and taught me, that my father cast a powerful positive shadow over my life, and that, despite life’s ups and downs, there are “fundamental aspects of our [family’s] relationship which will never change.”

Goodbye, Dad. I love you. Until we meet again.

In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.