

PLAIN TRUTH®

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The Father I Never Knew



By Greg Albrecht

In honor of parents everywhere, with Mother's Day and Father's Day in mind, allow me to share a letter I wrote to my father.

I never knew my father, so this is a different kind of letter, but still one to honor him and seek his love. I wrote this on the occasion of what would have been his 100th birthday, July 18, 2020...so here it is in time for his 101st birthday.

Elmer Otto Gustav Albrecht appears as your name (the name of my father) on my birth certificate—but I never knew you. Had you lived long enough, July 18, 2020 would have been your 100th birthday, but you only lived a few months past your 28th birthday. As I celebrate your 100th birthday, I mourn a past that never was and a father I never knew.

My "memories" of you have fashioned a mosaic-like image, emerging like a jigsaw puzzle, pieced together from mementos and stories. Those cherished treasures have helped me fill the massive hole in my heart.

I have gazed at old photos of you so often that it almost seems like I was there—I wasn't in most of them and the few in which we were together, I was far too young to remember. They are faded black-and-white photos, prized souvenirs of the father I never knew.

I have the flag that was draped over your coffin and the dog tags you wore around your neck when you served in the United States Navy during World War 2.

I have the faded front-page hometown newspaper article reporting the details of your death.

I have your old watch that quit running long before I learned to tell time.

I had your baptismal certificate framed—it's a beautiful and ornate piece of art, with the text in German. It connects me with you, because I was baptized as an infant in the same church building as you were.

I have your old Bible—a dog eared copy of the New Testament and the book of Psalms.

I have spent my entire life

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looking for you, the father I never knew—a military veteran who survived the war only to be suddenly taken from my mother, the love of your life, in a tragic accident.

I have no real memories of you at all, but I have loved you since I was old enough to know that I never knew you. I have missed you all my life—I still do.

Before she was also unexpectedly killed in a car accident 37 years after your death, my mother told me stories about you. Her stories left me with impressions of a legendary, super-heroic, strong and loving man who was my father.

With regrets I must report that I, your only child, fall far short of those larger-than-life stories I have heard about you. Even when I was younger and “in-shape,” my body was never as muscular or as strong as yours apparently was.

My mother and many of my relatives have told me you were admired as a Paul Bunyan-like character in our hometown—they said everyone liked you, you were

kind, generous and a hard worker. When you left home to join the Navy, they say you wrote everyone “back home” that the rigors of the military were like a vacation compared with the long hours you worked on the farm.

Like those old black-and-white photos, time has distorted reality and you remain a mythical creation in my mind. While I know my mental portrait of you is an exaggerated illusion, I am thankful for that idealistic picture as I know many who live with painful, real nightmare memories of fathers who have abandoned and/or abused them.

In many ways I am thankful I have been encouraged and allowed to make you whatever I have wanted you to be—though I know much of the picture is not based on factual reality. I’ve lived long enough now to know you had to be very human (I am quite certain my genetic weaknesses and predispositions to dysfunctions and behaviors did not all come from my mother!).

I have been told that when you were a young boy your family endured the Depression and the Dust Bowl on a little farm just outside Herington, Kansas—the town where you were born and where you are buried. I know that you and your twin sister Velma started school without knowing much English, but they say you both learned English quickly.

During the Great



Depression, I am told the only food Grandma Albrecht had available to make school lunches for you and Velma was homemade bread from the little wheat they were able to grow and lard from the few pigs they had.

I have traveled the world and I have seen misery, poverty and horrific disease, but I never imagined my own father growing up with such hard-scrabble hardships and impoverishment.

Most of us want our parents to think highly of us and be proud of what we did and what we became. I do. I hope when we finally meet, you will be proud.

Still, at the same time, I also know that I have lived a far from perfect life, and like all children, I have done things I never want you to know. I am confident our loving heavenly Father will never tell you the bad stuff.

I believe with all my being that we will meet—not again—but for the first time. What a party that will be! We have a lot of catching up to do.

See you soon, I love you Dad.

Your loving son,

Greg □

