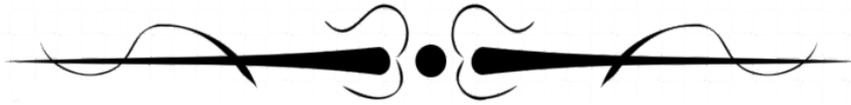


DeWaine C. Silker



June 19, 1929 - November 4, 2020

Laurie, David, Susan, John, family and friends, grace and peace to you from the one who lived for us, who died for us, and who now claims victory over every grave, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.



DeWaine Silker was born near the beginning of the Great Depression, in June of 1929. Life was hard. Like a lot of babies back then, DeWaine was born at home. Unlike most of those babies, though, he was born with the umbilical cord wrapped around his neck. I wonder if that might have been a precursor of things to come. After all, the sport of wrestling would one day become a primary part of DeWaine's life. He would find himself comfortable in tight spaces, parts of the body tangled up in a great variety of ways. DeWaine was sometimes heard to say: "All that I am and all that I have, I owe it to wrestling."

DeWaine grew up in Rochester. He was big into sports: football, track, and of course, wrestling. He was proud of his school. As he saw it, the senior class of 1947 at Rochester High was arguably the greatest class in school history. When I asked him why that was, he came up with a long list of notable classmates, and he wasn't even including himself.

A young woman named Norma Larson was part of the class of '47. She met DeWaine when she sat next to him in social science class. DeWaine was convinced, and Norma too, that God meant for them to be in the same room together.

Sometime later there was a school dance. Norma was checking coats. She asked DeWaine if he wanted to stop by and see her. To this day, the children delight in noting that "technically" mom asked dad out on their first date. And DeWaine came through. He stopped by the coat check area. And, from what I've been told, he never left.

This was going to take some strategizing on Norma's part. Wrestling season was coming up. DeWaine had reputation of dating a girl for a few months, and then breaking up before the start of wrestling. Evidently, he didn't want the distraction. So, Norma, ever the resourceful one, started going out with DeWaine only *after* the season was over. It worked! These two hit it off.

Soon DeWaine was off to Iowa State Teachers College. He was studying mathematics and physical education. He was on the wrestling team. Still, DeWaine found himself pulled back to Rochester, and pretty much every weekend. He and Norma were getting close. They began talking about a wedding.

There was an important issue to consider. DeWaine had grown up outside the church. Norma was baptized and grew up going to Zumbro. DeWaine made the decision to get baptized before he walked Norma down the aisle. The day was June 19, 1948. I don't know this is true, but I wonder - with baptism *and* a new bride - could a slight crack be developing in DeWaine's mantra: "All that I am and all that I have, I owe it to...wrestling"? Maybe? And even after a national championship in wrestling in the spring of 1950, DeWaine had to feel stretched. Maybe there *was* more to life than he had previously known.

Norma and Dewaine set up housekeeping in married student housing at Iowa State. Dewaine's father owned a trailer park. He got them started in a 22½-foot mobile home. It was definitely cozy. After a couple of years, they were back in Rochester. DeWaine had been working on another degree, but when he found out that Norma was expecting their first child, he decided he better focus on teaching.

Laurie was born in 1951. Then David came along in '55, and Sue in '56. And finally, John in '63.

DeWaine was often busy working. Norma was the glue that held the family together. Whether she was cooking or cleaning, providing, or protecting, nurturing or refereeing, Norma was dedicated to making a home for her children.

Duane started teaching mathematics at Rochester Junior College. In his spare time, he refereed high school football and wrestling. He was a favorite of many of the students. He was good at drawing them out. He made math come alive. He was approachable. Son John said it well: "If he weren't my dad, I'd still want to know him."

From time to time, DeWaine got philosophical about the craft of teaching. He said things like: "If you want students to participate, you have to model it. As a teacher, you need to be actively engaged. If you want respect in the classroom, you can't demand it. It must be earned." DeWaine loved what he did. He had a favorite adage: "No matter what you do, do it well!"

The family managed to squeeze in some vacation time. Camping trips were a favorite. They went to MN state parks, and national parks such as Glacier, Yosemite, Mount Rushmore, and the Grand Canyon. They often camped in tents. They regularly gathered around a campfire. They made s'mores and told ghost stories. Dad was a wonderful storyteller.

DeWaine was an active presence at Zumbro. He was congregational president in 1982. He counted weekly offerings for twenty-four straight years. He always sat on the left side facing the front. He had a habit of whistling the closing hymn through the rest of the day. He often helped serve communion. And get this: DeWaine often listened to the sermon with his eyes closed, but he assured me that he heard every word of it.

In the late 1960s, Dewaine's adventuresome side came out. He was invited to teach at The American College of Girls in Istanbul, Turkey. The family gathered around the kitchen table to discuss it. They weren't exactly sure where Turkey was, so they looked it up on the map. Mom and Dad thought this would be an excellent opportunity for their kids to make some new friends, to expand their horizons, and maybe even to watch a little less TV.

So, in a spirit of adventure, the family decided to pack up and go. They described their three years in Turkey like this: the first year was culture shock; the second year they liked it; and the third year they didn't want to leave. For a time and a season, Turkey had become their home. They even went camping in Cappadocia, not in tents but in caves. As far as they knew, they were the only Americans to be found. DeWaine stayed awake all night guarding the family.

All good things come to an end, of course. The Silkers came back to Rochester. The kids grew up and started going to college. Before you know it, there were weddings, and then grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren. Life in the Silker household was rich and full. Friends noticed. It was not uncommon for someone to say, "There is so much love in this family!" Deep down they knew it was true. And to think it all got started in a classroom, when a boy and girl sat side-by-side, and soon were convinced that God meant for it to be.

I last saw DeWaine on November 1, All Saints Day. I'd gotten a call from David that DeWaine was actively dying. Could I come to La Crosse to see him? "Certainly," I said, "I'd be honored." I have to confess, though, that I had a little trouble finding the place. I'd left my cell phone in Rochester. I had only an address scribbled on a piece of paper, but no directions on how to get there and no phone number either.

Thank God for the kindness of strangers, and not one but two. Eventually I made it. I was able to spend some quality time with DeWaine. He asked a few questions about the renovation project at church. At an earlier visit, I had shown him pictures of the new sanctuary. He immediately commented: "I want to have my funeral there." He reminded me of that. We read scripture, and we prayed, and we sang quietly under our masks, "Children of the Heavenly Father." I made the sign of the cross on DeWaine's forehead, the sign he'd received in baptism. As I left his bedside, I hoped my visit had brought measure of peace for him. I know it did for me.

Friends, I have no doubt that DeWaine's first love in life was wrestling. But as time passed, I think things started changing. God came in baptism; and Norma and DeWaine pledged their lives to each other in marriage; and eager students showed up in the classroom to learn mathematics; and four delightful children were born to enrich a household; and then grandchildren and great-grandchildren, too. Yes, I have to believe that over the years, DeWaine's world got bigger, much bigger. And it was so very good!

Today we reluctantly offer DeWaine back to God. As Jesus neared the end of his life, he promised to go on ahead and prepare a place for us. He promised a world with no more pain, or tears, or sickness, or death. He promised to make all things new. With that promise in view, we trust that DeWaine - and Norma - are living in Christ's new world even now. Amen.

Pastor Vern Christopherson
July 17, 2021