

Let's Discuss an Ornery Cuss, Larry Blankenship

He had the diplomacy of a bazooka. He cussed with cadence, the proficient profanity of a drill sergeant who gets right to the point. He learned it the hard way: World War II and Korea. He had skin like a sand lot catcher's mitt, and no determined little tic ever bore deeper into your hide if he had a bone to pick. A cartoonist would have drawn him as a badger with his teeth in your boot, back-pedaling with all his might as you drug him along. He was ornery, cantankerous, and ubiquitous — and everybody loved him.

Larry Blankenship would have been 96 years old this last Pearl Harbor Day, and now he is gone. Not sure where, because if God has a balance scale of good and bad it might be bouncing up and down like a grade school teeter totter.

An advocate for Larry would undoubtedly bring up how many lives he saved bobbing around in the water for three hours after the USS Benevolence sunk. How many sailors and soldiers he saved

CARL'S CORNER **By Carl Gustafson**

as a Medic in two wars where he was awarded 15 medals — and I would beg God's pardon to point out that the old codger saved my life 10 years ago.

He and I have laughed together many times since because the other players in the league playfully scolded Larry for his heroics because it was their big chance to get rid of me. How he did it reveals why we loved Larry and why God most likely does too.

I had a heart attack after crossing home plate on a full run, my lungs on fire. I collapsed in the dugout but threatened everyone who tried to help insisting I would be fine. With anger I forbid anyone to call an ambulance.

But I couldn't intimidate Larry. When he saw me his WWII medic's personality kicked in, he examined me and began pushing on my chest, and he said, "You can kick my ass when you get out of the hospital, but by God

you're going."

I died and remained dead for almost 45 seconds while the ambulance personnel revived me. The heart surgeon said I'd already begun to decompose. Fifteen percent of my heart is still dead today and always will be. Had Larry been indecisive, or less courageous, or less passionate about his lifetime need to save others, he'd have been dissuaded by my macho blustering and my life would have ended at 63 years old.

This raw, rough, and rugged old man was on the softball field six days a week until only four days before he died. He had all the different San Diego league's softballs stockpiled in his garage and his car trunk was a cornucopia of softball flotsam and jetsam, ancient bats, gloves, scorebooks, spare hats, shirts and socks — dirty and clean.

Softball was his society, his family, his life. He despised rainouts, byes, forfeits and taking games off for holidays. He wanted to be on the softball field every day.

He delighted in the characters he would encounter at the games and loved softball players above all the muck and mire of humanity. His loyalty was unparalleled, and his ever-present smirk bespoke the humor that accompanied his craggy image in a coruscating aura. He loved to laugh and was secure enough to allow us all to make fun of his age on a daily basis.

He had a military funeral with gun salutes and flags and a standing-room-only audience, and now you may want to join in a final salute to this brave little rascal who made our game his life; who would have saved your life had it been you instead of me, who saved many lives in the perils of war, and who lives on through the descendants of those he saved who would never have been born had he not been the determined and loyal friend with the tenacity of that cartoon badger.

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