

The Swanson Times

August 7, 2004



The Head Wrangler

When he steps into the firelight after checking on the horses, conversation ceases. He shoves his hat back on his head, takes off his worn leather gloves, and holds his hands out to the warmth. Everyone waits to see if he's got anything to say because he's the boss, or as they all like to affectionately call him, the head wrangler.

The collar of his fleece-lined deerskin jacket is turned up against the chill of the autumn evening air, and his clean-shaven cheeks are ruddy with cold. He squints his blue eyes while he looks into the fire, and then finds a vacant stump in the circle.

Someone passes him a steaming cup of strong black coffee and he immediately cups his rough hands around it and takes a sip. The steam momentarily fogs his glasses, but he takes a deep contented breath and pays no attention. As the conversation picks up again there is some discussion about who wants to make a spike camp. Deer season opens tomorrow and some of the younger guys want to be on their stands at dawn. But he just listens because spike camps no longer beckon him. A warm sleeping bag on a four-inch sheet of foam inside a tent is what he likes now.

Happiness sits on him like a second skin. This evening and the ones to follow are what he's been aiming at for the last two months. He has guided the group through the complicated process that makes this evening and the ones to follow possible. There was the preparation of the tack gear; reviewing the grocery list; buying the groceries and other supplies; getting the

horses shod; planning the transportation of horses, people, and gear to the trailhead; filling the pack boxes; loading the horses; taking care of a thousand other things; and finally, leading the way up the nine-mile trail to the deer camp high in the mountains. His experience and know-how are what stands between this well-organized camp and chaos.

He stretches his bony blue-jeaned legs and dusty leather boots toward the fire and answers questions about the best places to hunt on the next day. His talk is filled with descriptions of ravines, peaks, meadows, willows, and various other landmarks of the rugged country that surrounds the campsite. He joins the discussion about technique and strategy, but his is the final word. After all, he's filled his deer tags every year for longer than this group has been hunting.

The snaps of his western-style shirt catch the firelight as he begins to relax and really enjoy this year's gathering. He glances around at the faces and the lines in his face get deeper as he smiles at his companions. His bald head gleams when he briefly lifts his hat to rub his scalp. Some old stories are being told, and events of the days just past are being discussed, some of which will become stories for future campfire circles. There is much laughter and plenty of ribbing for those who did something silly, but the head wrangler is satisfied.

His name is Ray Swanson and he's surrounded by his family and friends. It's the third weekend in September, 9,000 feet up in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California, and life is good. If you ask him



why he does all this, he'll tell you that it's so he can come up here into these mountains that he reverently calls "the country." But what he doesn't say is that without this group of people it wouldn't be worth a plugged nickel.

Li'l Wrangler

When I was about 5 and Ray was about 8, every night after dinner we would get on our stick horses and ride way out into the field to capture all the bad people. Ray had the fastest horse and I had the second fastest. We lived in Escalon at the time Ray and I played at being the good guys.

Helen Cohagan

Fists and A Loud Voice

The Wrangler and his daughter, Beverly, were on their way home from Church late one evening. They were almost to Airport Way (then known as Durham Ferry Road) when they noticed two cars pulled over to the right side of the road.

There was a man standing by the driver's window of one of the cars. He was yelling at the driver and waving what appeared to be a pipe of some kind.

When he leaned into the car and began to hit the driver with the pipe, that was it! The Wrangler

slammed on his brakes and pulled over behind the two cars.

He was out of his car in an instant. Quickly he covered the few feet to the man with the pipe all with while hollering at him to quit it.

Well, the guy must have been the biggest coward in the world. He could have turned the pipe on the Wrangler and probably gotten in a few good licks. After all, the Wrangler was armed with nothing more than his fists and a loud voice.

But the bully only said a couple

of words back, and then ran to his car, quickly jumped in and drove away.

On later reflection, the Wrangler admitted it was probably not the smartest thing in the world to do, because both he and Beverly could have been hurt. But he got so mad at that bully with a pipe beating on that driver, he acted without thinking. He saw something wrong and stopped it.

As for Beverly, she didn't get scared until later. It was way too exciting!

Ray Swanson and Flash

This is a story about a horse.....and we called the horse "Flash." Flash, that's an odd name for this particular horse, because he was slow, a little bit lazy, and he was always getting into some sort of odd trouble of some kind. He was also a bit of a clown.

Early one summer, years ago, found the four of us, Ray Swanson, Al Yaeger, Ted Crom, and myself (Warren Dale) taking a pack trip into the back country from Kennedy Meadows.

We were headed for Snow Lake, which was about 20 or 22 miles, into the Immigrant Basin Wilderness Area, to do a little fishing and horsing around. So, there were 4 men and 4 pack horses. Each rider had a pack animal in tow that was carrying the rider's personal equipment and essentials. Well, we made it pretty good going in, as it was a long, hard day's ride on horseback.

We arrived at Snow Lake and selected a suitable place to set up our camp. Each of us started unloading the pack boxes from our

pack animals. We'd lift the pack box off of one side of the pack frame saddle and set it down behind the horse a ways, then go to the other side of the horse to take that box down. When we got to Flash, Ray had him unloaded in short order. But all of a sudden there was one

heck of a racket, and we'd thought that 'ol Flash had stepped on Ray's foot or something because Ray was carrying on something awful. But

that wasn't the case at all. Old Flash had a big surprise in store for his buddy Ray you see, because he'd suddenly backed up and proceeded to fill Ray's pack boxes up with "road apples."

You all know what a "God fearing" man Ray is, and I'm gonna' testify here and now, that, even though he was boiling mad, he chose his words real careful like! That episode sure did put a strain on Ray and Flash's relationship, though and I'm quite sure that Ray never did forgive that cantankerous, old horse.

"...even though he was boiling mad, he chose his words real careful like!"

I'm also sure that we each said a little prayer, thanking the good Lord that Ray had not been stepped on or injured. And, believe you me, we were very, VERY thankful *and* lucky that those weren't the food boxes that got filled up that day!

Lucky for us and especially lucky for 'ol Flash!

Warren Dale

On The Farm

When I think of Ray, memories of wonderful summer vacations spent on the farm in Escalon come to mind. Even though he was always working hard, he was enthusiastic, warm, loving and happy to see us. His smile was infectious and he was good and patient with us "city kids." I think I even recall his giving us rides on Dolly, the horse. I can also remember his visits to our home when he was in the U.S. Navy during World War II. He was a good looking sailor!

Dorothy (Henry) Lundquist

A Message To Ray Swanson

From Karen "Cohagen" Bartolomei

Dear Ray,

A favorite memory I have of you is when Ron and I were bundled in the middle of the night by our mother and put in a black Chevy and told we were going to San Diego. That was fine by us. She said we were going with Uncle Ray. I think it must have been when you were stationed in the Navy there because I vaguely remember barracks. I remember Verna Rae, Ron, perhaps Beverly (although she must have been pretty young if she was there) running up and down dirt hills in the back of the barracks.

I was told that when I was a baby and a very young child that you would take me with you and carry me around on your shoulder. I can picture this in my mind very vividly, although I was too young to remember. I was at Grandma Swanson's and you were there too.

I was always under the impression that I was named after you because my middle name is "Rae." I told my children that story many times. I've always felt a special bond with you because of this. Our youngest grandchild "Christopher

Ray Bartolomei" also shares our name.

When I was a little older I remember going to the "pasture" with Ray and his family. Sometimes we'd go to church or sometimes get a bite after. I didn't realize at the time that going to the "pasture" was work for you but a great time for us.

I remember Aunt Cordelia's Christmas Eve's when the family all came together. It was a magical time as a child. Aunt Lois would always bring a beautiful fruit salad. I remember you always had a child in tow. I remember you in Cordelia's kitchen with a child on your shoulders. It's funny the little things that stand out in your memories as a child. I can picture that as if it was yesterday.

As an adult, I remember Ray and his family attending our daughters' weddings. I can remember exactly where you were sitting and me going up to you, so happy that

you were there.

Another recent memory was when I visited you at St. Joseph's before your last heart surgery. I went over on my lunch hour from work. It was a time we were alone because everyone had just left or were just coming. The nurse came in and wanted to check you. You grabbed my hand and looked into my eyes and said proudly "this is my niece." There was definitely a connection.

So on this 90th Birthday Celebration we all have fond memories of Ray, but most importantly, we're able to be here and tell Ray that in person. That's what's so important and special about today.

"Happy Birthday," Ray

We all love you.

Your niece,

Karen Rae

When I was a baby ... you would take me with you and carry me around on your shoulder."

I Hear God's Voice

I used to enjoy hunting deer, partly because it was a challenge, but also because of the magnitude of the mountains. This is one of God's creations that has always made me realize how big God is.

On opening morning of deer season in about 1975, I was standing on the edge of a high ledge just enjoying the greatness of what I was seeing. I was so filled with the bigness and beauty that was before me that I had to tell

God how much I enjoyed it. I stood there praising and thanking him for some time (I have no idea how long). I finally came back to myself and said, "I came up here to hunt so maybe I should do so."

I was considering which way I should go. If I went to my left, I would be going into an area I wasn't as familiar with. The way to my right was more familiar, but I decided to go to my left. As I turned to go, a voice very clearly

said, 'NO, DON'T GO THAT WAY.'

I stopped and began to walk the other way contemplating what had just happened. I walked about 50 yards to a ravine, and there stood a big 4-point buck which I then shot. What can you say after having had such an experience? Thank you Lord!

J. R. Swanson

Memories And Adventures

Ray and Bud Bellmer became good friends in the early 1950's when both worked at Folsom Prison. In 1955 Ray took Bud and me on two packtrips introducing us to the beauty of Sonora Pass, Emigrant Wilderness, and North Yosemite areas - the first for fishing and a few weeks later for hunting. That was the beginning of almost 25 years of yearly packtrip vacations together - what adventures and of course the wonderful memories to recall when age put an end to riding and we could no longer lift those heavy Western saddles.

Ray generously provided his horses that first year - I rode Honey and kept an eye on Rusty who ran free loaded with camp gear and food. The next year Ray was instrumental in our purchasing my wonderful pony from his friend Ernie Aderholt. Prince, a combination of Welsh Pony and Tennessee Walker, was my buddy and the smoothest ride for over 20 years. Bud had a lovely mare, Patty, who objected to our home-made trailer's slick finish. She tried to climb over the front, so unnerving for Bud that on the spot he offered her to Ray. We'd tried to have her

*"In 1955 Ray ...
introduced us to the
beauty of Sonora Pass,
Emigrant Wilderness, and
North Yosemite Areas"*

bred twice with no luck, but Ray waved his magic wand and Patty added many foals to his horse family.

Adventures included the trip Ray transported a truckload of horses, seemed like a dozen to me, in an old flatbed truck with home-made sides and tailgate. Attempting to pull up a famous steep grade, it died. Amazingly our old pickup was able to push it up and over. I don't recall how Ray made it to the sheep corral where we stopped for what little was left of the night, but that old truck was left there for a long time. Sometimes the horses caused a bit of worry, taking off for another meadow, pulling a shoe on the trail. Ray had a large mare named Flicka and felt she should be hobbled in camp - what a sight to see when Ray took after her as her hobbles gave her jack-rabbit speed up a hill. Ray won.

The competition between Ray and Ray Todd on fishing trips was always fun, especially the humorous banter between the two as to the most or biggest fish. Coming in to Horse Meadow on a deer hunt, in a snowstorm, we noticed hunters dashing out of the Forest Service barn headed for a ranger's



cabin. turned out to be a group connected with an area mine, I think molybdenum, and one had a key. Our group spent the night shivering in the barn's tack area listening to the stomping and occasional squeal of all the horses.

When Lois and the children joined the packtrips, everyone looked forward to her specialty, a yummy recipe she called something like "Schlopps 't magimmel". Of course, the hi-jinx of the young folk added excitement and sometimes worry to a trip.

I could go on and on recalling those wonderful days, but will just say Bud and I were so grateful and blessed with Ray and his family's friendship and for making all those years of wonderful memories.

Happy 90th, Ray, with love,

Adele (Bellmer)

A Man For All Children

The Wrangler loves his kids all the way down to the youngest great grandchild.

He had Tommy with him one time at Montgomery Ward, and when he got to the checkstand he let go of Tommy's hand so he could pay. As all children do, Tommy immediately ran! The police were called and they found him, but all the Wrangler could think was,

"What am I going to tell Emmie!" He was still white-faced when he got home and told Emmie, "I almost lost Tommy."

All his kids knew that when they got a sliver, he was the "go to" guy. He was gentle with the needle and tweezers, and took most of the fear out of the process - even when it hurt.

Twelve-year-old Irene was with The Wrangler in Modesto when he was shopping for the 1963 green Dodge pickup. It was a scary part of town, but she felt safe because The Wrangler was holding her hand.

The Cowboy

When I think of Ray a few things come to mind immediately:

(1) My first and only experience of trying to milk a cow was with him. He was very patient and tried every technique he knew, and kept telling me "Don't worry you'll get it". Well, I did try and try and try, but I didn't get even one drop out of that old cow!! I never tried that again. I guess you just can't put the country in a city girl.



(2) One time Irene and I were running around in the front yard barefooted and I stepped on a t-bone

steak bone. The bone stuck in my foot and I yelled and screamed until Ray came to my rescue. He pulled the bone out of my foot and doctored me up to walk another day. What a guy!!

(3) Of course, the very best memory is of Ray listening to the trio sing "How Big is God!!"

He was always one of our biggest fans, and just seeing him in the audience gave me encouragement. When his tears would start to flow I have to admit it was hard to keep singing!

I just have to say that I really love him. He still has the firmest

and best hugs around!! In fact, when he gives me a hug on Sunday mornings I'm always a little worried that we both might end up on the floor. Oh what a sight that would be.

Ray has always been such an inspiration to me. He has been faithful in his walk

with God and a great example to me personally. As a very young girl and through my adult life I have been privileged to witness the life of a man who truly loves God with all of his heart.

Melanie Waddle

"I just have to say that I really love him."

The Chevy with The Automatic Transmission

In 1961 The Wrangler bought a grey Chevy pickup with an automatic transmission. Big mistake!! He was used to down-shifting when pulling a loaded horse trailer, but there was no gear low enough in that automatic so over by Bridgeport the brakes got hot and he thought he was going to lose it. He was about ready to tell Jerry Wilson (who didn't even know there was a

problem) to jump out when the road sort of leveled off. He got it stopped by putting it in reverse and then throwing it into park. When he finally stopped shaking (and the brakes cooled down) they proceeded. But that was the end of the automatic transmission. By 1963 he was back to a stick shift with compound (and he put brakes on the trailers).

His kids remember sitting six across the bench seat of that Chevy (no bucket seats, club cabs, or seat belts then). One time on a snowy road at Strawberry he purposely made the truck feel like it was sliding to play a little trick on his kids. He sat there with a little wicked smile on his face the whole time.

"Stop! Hands Up!"

One morning very early The Wrangler was awakened by the noise of someone getting into his garage. He quietly got out of bed, found his handgun and went to the door. Outside he saw someone carrying an object toward a car parked in the driveway. Clad only in his underwear he opened the door, pointed the gun at the person and called "Stop! Hands up!"

Imagine his surprise when he heard a scared voice saying, "Ray,

Ray, it's me, Mike. I'm just borrowing a boat oar."

It was the new husband of the Wrangler's daughter, Irene, just coming to Pop's house like a true son to borrow something.



That's A Dad

Then there was the time the Wrangler's daughter, Verna, damaged Dr. Mellor's pickup. Now Dr. Mellor was not only a neighbor and a friend, but Lois worked for him. Verna was scared and knew she was in big trouble! But she wasn't. In fact, the Wrangler took care of it and she never heard a word about it.

Now that's a man to be glad to have for a Dad.

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Spotting Deer

There are few people in this world that have experienced the thrill of "spotting" deer. In the 1950's cars had spotlights on the outside of the car on the driver's side with a control lever on the inside of the car. Many Sunday nights after church (yes, maybe 9 or 10pm) The Wrangler and his wife would take their children for a ride all the way up to Strawberry to "spot" deer.

The way it is done is that you drive very slowly and point the spotlight at the trees to catch the eyes of the deer. What a thrill to see the pinpoint of light reflected in the deer eyes. They looked like diamonds in the night trees.

Stopping for a bite to eat at the Europa Inn in Sonora, and getting home very late was an important part of the experience – even if everyone had to get up early the next morning for work or school.

Program

Emcee - John Swanson

Welcome

Early Life

Song – "You'll Always Be A Child" - John Lyons

Married Escalon Years

Song – How Big is God – Melotones

Manteca Years

Song – "Straight and Narrow Way" – Beverly

Movie - "Happy Trails"

Introduce Helen Cohagan

Immediate Family Stand

Everyone related to Ray stand

Violin Solo – "Ba Ba Black Sheep" – Megan Hughes

Open Mic

Sing "Happy Birthday"

Cake Cutting

Party continues at 6pm at Bud and Kim's House on

Swanson Road

Notes

I think this is such a great tribute to Ray. My mother (Karen Bartolomei) has always told me she was named after Ray (Karen Rae). She often talked about Ray and his sense of humor.

Sincerely, Kristi Michaels (Cohagan-



Batolomei-Michaels)

At one of our Christmas Eve candle-light services, we were praying with Ray and Doris and sharing communion. Ray was so tender to the Lord and thanking Him for all He had done for him. We were so blessed by his tears of thanksgiving - we all started crying and praising God. We've never experienced a more precious time of communion. Oh that we all could have such hearts every day as Ray does for Christ.

Pastor Scott and Michaelle Hoag

My special memory of Uncle Raymond goes back to when I was a little girl. I always thought of him as a cowboy and always thought of the horses I knew he had and associated those horses with deer hunting and my Dad and Grandpa. One day I was at his house and standing beside a big horse—Rusty. I remember thinking how big the horse seemed when suddenly he kicked with his back leg. I remember hearing the swish of his hoof go by my head. I wasn't hurt, but when I see or think of horses I think of Uncle Raymond. God Bless You All--

Ken and Kathleen (Seaquist) Allred



The memories we have of Ray are good ones. He is a strong devoted Christian man. We remember the many venison dinners at church that he made sure to hunt us a good

dinner - even when he couldn't do it himself he'd have others follow through. God Bless him.

Josie and Norman Gould



One of my fondest memories of Uncle Ray is him teaching me how to handle/ride horses. I will never forget one deer hunting trip when we camped at Clark's Fork...I remember waking up the next morning with ice all over my sleeping bag.

Herb Swanson



I have an awful lot of good memories with you, but the thing that made me feel best was when I finally decided that you were one of my very best friends.

Your Son, Ray Read