

# **A Remembrance of Kay David Shawcroft – A Life Well Lived**

By Cameron Humphres, with contributions from so many that dearly loved Kay

## **Opening**

Although it is impossible to fully describe the character of Kay David Shawcroft and what he meant to those that loved him, perhaps recalling some of the moments of his life will bear witness to the exceptional manner in which he lived and tenderly remind us of the person we dearly loved.

The most cherished memories shared by family and friends of Kay reveal character traits that consistently stand out – like his quiet strength, his gentleness, his competitive spirit, his infectious zeal for life, his joyful and unyielding commitment to those he loved, his big heart for service, and his sustained devotion to his faith. It was apparent they were the throughline of his life and they serve as the connecting theme of this remembrance.

## **The Beginning**

Kay's life began on January 18, 1938, born to Amel and Zelda Shawcroft, in Alamosa, Colorado. He was raised in the small rural communities of the San Luis Valley, a broad agricultural area surrounded by high snow-covered mountains, where his parents and extended family farmed, ranched, and expanded the Shawcroft clan. Kay was the first of three children his parents would welcome into the family, followed by Curt and Lynette.

One February morning, while the children were still very young, Kay's dad excitedly went on his very first airplane ride, and Kay remembered watching the aircraft fly over their home. Unfortunately, the day ended in tragedy – the aircraft crashed and Amel, along with the pilot and another passenger, died. And, at only 27 years old Zelda became a single mom of three children. At the time, Kay was only six and, on his account, he had a deep sense of the heavy responsibilities his mother was now shouldering, and he remembered having a strong desire to help. From this very young age and throughout his youth, Kay helped his mom with the chores around the house and farmed and ranched with his extended family to help provide for them.

## **Growing Up**

Of course, growing up wasn't just chores and work; Kay loved to play games with his siblings and friends: like Kick-the-Can, Run-Sheep-Run, Annie-Annie-Over, and others. And of course, his adolescence also included a bit of mischief – like sneaking a jar of his mom's famous canned peaches and sharing it with his brother and a friend while they hid from his mom. And perhaps to the chagrin of his mom, Kay developed an affinity for dogs – it seemed like any stray dog in the area would end up at their house.

It also was during these formative years that he began to develop and practice his faith, rising through the priesthood to eventually being ordained as an elder in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. During his youth, he also became an outdoorsman, hunting, fishing, and camping across the San Luis Valley and up into the high altitudes of the Brazos Mountains, where his extended family had a camp where they grazed their cattle in the summers.

## **Basketball**

In high school, he discovered he had a talent for basketball. At the time, there was a professional basketball player named Beavo. Kay was such a star player on his team that they nicknamed him Beavo. Kay could turn and dunk the ball into the basket right over a defender, and he had a signature hook shot that completely befuddled opposing teams. He loved basketball so much that he would even play during the break between Sunday School and the afternoon Sacrament meeting. Basketball was a great outlet for his competitive spirit, and he continued to play until his knees said they had quite enough as he approached his 40<sup>th</sup> birthday.

## **The Mission**

After high school, Kay answered the call to serve a two-year mission in Virginia. Years later he recounted the many doors he knocked on, the homes he visited, the lessons he gave, the testimonies he shared, and the conversions he witnessed. One funny story he recounted was knocking on a lady's door and when they introduced themselves as Mormon missionaries, she told them to take their hats off because she wanted to see their horns.

Well, they took off their hats and showed her that, alas, they didn't have horns. Kay never said if she was relieved or disappointed.

His fondest memories of that time, however, were of the people he met and the relationships he developed – like the little lady down the street that made him cookies once a week to satiate his sweet tooth, the family that had him over for dinner and game night to help him feel like he was back home, the kind man that would drive him to attend church or errands while telling funny stories along the way, and the local elders and members of the church that prayed over him to help him feel spiritually embraced. And of course, there were the people he played basketball with that kept his competitive spirit in good working order. True to Kay's nature, the most meaningful aspect of his mission were the amazing, kind and loving people in his life in a place that was foreign to him – and yes, Virginia can seem very foreign to a kid that grew up in Colorado.

### **The Army**

Following his mission, Kay was drafted into the U.S. Army, serving his enlistment in Germany. Although he was drafted and technically didn't have a choice, he was so very honored to serve his country – you can literally see it in his service picture – his bright smile suggests just how proud he was to wear that uniform.

They say that an Army runs on its stomach, meaning that it can't go anywhere without logistical support. Once, in Germany, Kay was assigned to a logistics unit that delivered fuel to keep thirsty military equipment and hungry basecamps operating.

Like his mission, his stories from that time centered around the people and relationships in his life – like the prankster that he joined up with on many elaborately planned capers, the group of guys that he played board and card games with during the downtime, and the local church families that would invite him for dinner overcoming their language barrier with fellowship, yummy food, and Kay's big appetite.

And then there was his band of brothers – the men that shared his faith and love for basketball. These five men would travel to attend church together

and seek every opportunity to play basketball. It is both enlightening and perhaps entertaining to imagine five very large men, all over six feet tall, stuffing themselves into the tiny Volkswagen Beetle they had somehow acquired, and traveling all around western Germany, attending church services, playing basketball, and singing hymns along the way.

### **San Luis Valley Return**

Following his enlistment, Kay returned to the San Luis Valley and continued the career he started in the Army – delivering fuel. This time the fuel kept thirsty farm and ranch equipment operating, and family's homes warm. Of course, his career really wasn't about the fuel – it was about the people and the relationships. Continuing the pattern from his mission and enlistment, his most cherished memories centered around the people – like the rancher that loved to trade pranks with him, the little lady that always had a warm batch of cookies waiting for him, the older widower who came out to share stories about his late wife. Even his customer's dogs were excited to see him and perhaps even wanted to follow him home.

Kay really knew and cared about his customers – he always had time for them, always had a story to share, and he always answered the call in the middle of the night when their pilot light went out on their heater during a dangerously cold winter storm. In truth, Kay considered them to be more friends than customers.

### **Raising a Family**

Along with his new career, Kay set out on the most meaningful chapter of his life — raising a family. Kay married and then welcomed Kevin, Leanne, and Valerie, into their young family, raising them in the same rural community where he spent his childhood. Unfortunately, as sometimes happens, the marriage didn't endure. However, Kay's love for and commitment to his children never wavered.

Nevertheless, Kay wanted to share his life and the joy of raising a family with a lifelong partner. One Saturday evening, with some prodding from his friends, Kay attended a church dance. Well, he caught the eye of a woman across the room and asked her to dance. Somewhere between the "do-si-

dos" and the "swing-your-partners", Kay and CleRae were smitten. After a proper courtship, they married. And with the marriage, Kay inherited two more children, Cameron and Sonda. He now had five children, and perhaps he realized that was enough for a basketball team. Sadly, however, it was not to be – none of the kids showed even the slightest talent for the sport.

### **The Games**

Instead of basketball, Kay taught the kids to love other games. Nearly every Family Home Evening, a time encouraged by the church to be set aside each week for a lesson, also included board games, darts, ping-pong, and card games. Kay was particularly fond of playing Garbage, a card game where you win by being the first to eliminate all the cards out of your hand. The remaining cards in each of the other players hands were considered the "garbage". Well, the kids spent a lot of time dealing with their garbage, so to speak, while Kay grinned, having won again. And it wasn't just Garbage that Kay won, he won nearly every game they played.

Now some may think that it was unkind of him to win so many games against his children, but they would be wrong. During every game, Kay created and fostered an atmosphere of fun, inclusion, and encouragement while engaging in friendly, and even loving competition. And because winning when playing him was never easy or purposefully influenced, it was a monumental event when it happened, and nobody would celebrate the victory more than Kay. Beating Kay at a game, especially Garbage, are some of his children's fondest memories.

### **The Brazos**

During those years, Kay also passed along his love for the outdoors, teaching his kids to hunt, fish, and camp. In fact, they made several trips up to that Brazos cow camp. All five kids and their parents would pile into their tiny Datson pickup truck with their camping gear and head up the mountain. But that poor little pickup was so underpowered that Kay and the kids had to get out and push, while CleRae drove up the steeper sections. And the road was so bumpy that it literally churned their milk into butter. But the family loved the adventure of the trip, and the cold mornings at the cabin, the

afternoons fishing, and evening meals cooked over the campfire, and of course the games afterwards.

### **A Father and His Faith**

Eventually, Kay and the family said goodbye to the San Luis Valley and the Brazos, moving to Northern Wyoming, near the Big Horn Mountains, to pursue a better job and new beginnings. But the family games and camping continued as Kay raised his family, pursued his interests, built and fostered new relationships, and lived his faith.

And Kay's faith was the foundation of being a warm, loving, and devoted father. He lived and shared his faith with his children, took them to church, prayed over them and laid hands on them when they were sick, shared lessons during family home evenings, baptized them, and ordained his sons in the priesthood. Kay certainly wanted to encourage his children's walk of faith; however, he never forced it – he believed that true faith comes from the exercise of free will on a personal journey seeking a relationship with Heavenly Father. Nevertheless, he was always there to guide, encourage, and demonstrate his faith. Kay was an amazing, loving, and supporting father that helped each of his children find their own faith and unique way into adulthood.

### **Empty Nest**

Once his children were all grown up and had moved away, Kay and CleRae moved to Sheridan Wyoming, where CleRae could pursue her career as a Psychiatric Nurse at the Veterans Hospital. As they transitioned to empty-nesters, other aspects of Kay's life also changed and in endearing ways – he retired but kept in touch with some of his former customers who were really friends all along, he traveled every year on a great circle route from Wyoming to Colorado to visit his extended family and friends, he gave up basketball in exchange for playing darts, 4-wheeling, jet skiing, and rafting, and he gave up hunting, which came about all because of some ducks.

### **The Ducks**

While living in Sheridan, some mallards, the type he had often hunted, showed up one year to summer on his expansive lawn and the adjacent river.

Excited to have mallards in his yard, Kay decided to throw out a little feed to entice them to stay a bit longer. And so began the mutual affection between Kay and his ducks, and unceremoniously ending his hunting days.

From that year on, the ducks invited their proteges to summer in Kay's yard with him feeding and attending to them like a benevolent caretaker which, in point of fact, he was. He even built them a comfortable pen to keep them safe and warm at night. Every evening, after feeding them in the yard, they would excitedly line up and waddle into their pen to be tucked in for the night.

As the news spread of what was going on over at the Shawcroft place, Ducks Unlimited contacted Kay and asked to borrow a few ducks for their annual banquet – and lest you think they were the main course, Kay would never have agreed. Instead, the ducks became the main attraction, quacking around in a comfortable straw-filled pen while the organizers tried to extract donations from the attendees saying their habitat was endangered. Of course, the habitat of these particular ducks was certainly not endangered. Nevertheless, the live display was successful, and the ducks seemed to enjoy the night out, so the arrangement continued for years.

### **The Grandchildren**

As his flock of ducks was expanding, so too was his family as his adult children started having children of their own. Before long, Kay welcomed his grandchildren, Brandon, Trevor, and McKayla Humphres; Colton, Dylan and Bryan Shawcroft; Brandon and Ashley Vice; Lacee Woods and Ranee Ward; into his family, and they were the apple of his eye. He made them feel so loved and special that each of them secretly thought they were his favorite.

Together they had so many fun adventures, pulled so many silly pranks on each other, and of course they played a crazy number of games. Whenever the family got together, every day always included a ping-pong tournament and a good measure of board and card games. And, like their parents, finally being able to beat grandpa at a game, especially Garbage, are some of their most cherished memories. Of course there are many others, like catching their first fish, going to their first movie, riding on the 4-wheeler, sledding down the snow hill, jet skiing, rafting down the river, and being wrapped up

in his big warm hugs. There are too many to recount here but they all have a common thread, Kay's joy and love in every shared moment.

### **Homestead**

While Kay purposefully filled his life with family and fun, he also endured many tragedies and hardships – the death of his father, his son, a daughter-in-law, his sister, and a grandson. And, later in life, like many, he developed a myriad of health issues that took a toll, and it became apparent that an expansive property and a flock of ducks were becoming too difficult to maintain – a change in his living situation was warranted.

After an extensive search, Kay and CleRae moved to an independent cottage in the Homestead Assisted Living community in Rexburg, Idaho. This move couldn't have been a better choice – they found a welcoming, warm, and loving community with the added benefits of not having to mow the lawn or shovel the snow. And they developed new friendships and enjoyed all the amazing activities: like 4-wheeling, ice skating, hayrides, rafting, trips to Yellowstone, and of course board and card games. It was a wonderful place for Kay to spend the last few years of his life.

### **Faith Sustained**

No matter the circumstances of his life – joyful or difficult; no matter where he lived – in a rural community or a foreign county; no matter what he was doing – serving on a mission or raising his family; Kay leaned into and demonstrated his faith. Perhaps nothing illustrates this more than when, near the end of his life, CleRae noticed some scabbing on his knees, and Kay explained that he was injuring them when he knelt for prayer, but he refused to give up his nightly practice. He sustained his devotion to his faith throughout and to the very end of his life.

### **Passing**

Kay's heart finally gave out and he died peacefully on May, 20<sup>th</sup>. Kay was preceded in death by his parents, Amel and Zelda; his sister, Lynette; his son, Kevin, and his Grandson, Brandon Vice. Perhaps it brings comfort to imagine the glorious reunion with these loved ones and his Heavenly Father.

## **Survived**

Kay is survived by his wife, CleRae, who was lovingly devoted to him over their 48-year marriage. In addition to sharing all the responsibilities of raising children, providing for the family, and the many obligations of life, she was also his primary caregiver. While caregiver fatigue is real, she tirelessly worked to ensure his needs were met and that he was able to live out his life at home. Kay is also survived by his brother, Curt; his children, Leanne, Valerie, Cameron, and Sonda; and his many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose and sincerest hope for this remembrance is to have borne witness to Kay, the exceptional manner in which he lived, and the amazing person he was to those that knew and loved him. Though we grieve his passing, we also celebrate a life well-lived. May the memories of Kay David Shawcroft encourage us to live a life filled with joy, strength, love, and faith.