

## Eulogy for Abner Tolly

2072 words made an approximately 15-minute speech. The loved one had lived to age 88:

[Note on context at the beginning of this speech: a reading of this poem, attributed to John Wesley, preceded delivery of this eulogy: “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in **all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.**”]

The Wesley poem is about generosity, and Abner Tolly was generous to a fault. He was a man of his word, and his word was golden. He was of a generation when a handshake was enough.

My name is Harry Allen, and I had the honor and privilege to be Abner’s son-in-law and his caregiver for the final years of his life. Abner lived with his daughter Eve and me for all too short of a time in Austin. I got to know him very well and gave a willing ear to his many stories about ghosts, about growing up in Longview, serving his country proudly, running a successful retail business, taking care of his wife Abigail, and loving - and often worrying about - his family.

Abner would be embarrassed about the fuss we are making over him today. He was very uncomfortable drawing attention to himself, and

**Commented [LE1]:** Transition within this memorial ceremony.

**Commented [LE2]:** Description of loved one in one or two sentences, which lays out the general theme of the speech: his character.

**Commented [LE3]:** Identify speaker

**Commented [LE4]:** Relationship of speaker to deceased/role played by speaker during his life

**Commented [LE5]:** Personality trait. This is revisited as part of the closing words of the speech using parallelism.

although he took responsibility, he did not take the credit for his actions and how he improved the world around him.

**Commented [LE6]:** Statement of the man's fundamental character, a primary theme of this remembrance

He never wanted to be a trouble to anyone, and fiercely asserted his independence almost to the end, often to his detriment. He did not like to ask for help as he aged and could no longer do some of the things that he used to do, which sometimes made it more difficult for us than if he had asked. That's o.k., though -- we never minded helping him to get back on his horse when life threw him down.

**Commented [LE7]:** Personality trait

Abner grew up in Longview. He attended South Ward Elementary School, where he won a yo-yo-ing contest sponsored by the Duncan Yo-Yo company, which went into business three years before he was born.

**Commented [LE8]:** Hometown

**Commented [LE9]:** Education detail

**Commented [LE10]:** Childhood accomplishments

Abner could make a yo-yo dance on the end of a string. He graduated from Longview High School, and after that, he went to the Bish Mathis Institute where he learned how to file, touch-type, and take shorthand.

**Commented [LE11]:** Education detail

**Commented [LE12]:** Education detail

**Commented [LE13]:** Skills acquired

He was the only young man enrolled there at that time, and I kidded him that he only went there since that's where the girls were -- and he had no competition. I would make him laugh and smile at that idea, with a merry twinkle in his eyes.

**Commented [LE14]:** Speaker interaction with deceased

Abner was best friends with Rip Torn while in high school, a man who would become a famous - some might say infamous -- actor and comedian. He later befriended another famous former actor, George McFarland, who had portrayed the character "Spanky" in the short film series "Our Gang" and "The Little Rascals." Spanky had become the

**Commented [LE15]:** Friends: Famous People

**Commented [LE16]:** Friends: Famous People

national sales training expert for Philco, the appliance maker owned by the Ford Motor Company.

His mom Minnie Belle “Mama Belle” and Dad Alvin Artemis Tolly started Tolly’s General Store, located on Tyler Street in Longview. They let their Sonny - that’s what his Mom called him -- sell candy and cokes, which was Abner’s first experience in business as a child. They began to sell home furnishings, and Tolly’s became Tolly Furniture.

**Commented [LE17]:** Family: Parents of deceased

**Commented [LE18]:** Family nickname for deceased

As a teenager, Abner’s dad helped him set up a motorcycle shop which sold and serviced the lightweight Servi-Cycle motorcycles made by Simplex Manufacturing of New Orleans. Abner became popular among his teenage peers because he knew how to fix their motor bikes, and it was this spirit of service that served him well through his life.

**Commented [LE19]:** Deceased’s early business, description, etc.

Abner enlisted in the U.S. Army after graduating from secretarial school. A recruiter had promised him that he would work on motorcycle engines for the Army. He was sent to Camp Polk in Louisiana for basic training, and he told a harrowing story of a bivouac crawling with spiders and snakes - lots of snakes - in the bayou swamps. The Army decided to make him a medic, working on buck privates instead of motorcycles. He was treating trench-foot by painting soldier’s toes with gentian violet - the Army had lied to him about putting him in the motor pool.

**Commented [LE20]:** Military Service

**Commented [LE21]:** Military Story 1

Abner seemed resigned to this turn, but then an opportunity opened for him to transfer from the Army over to the recently formed U.S. Air Force,

which offered him the ability to put his hands to use -- not working on motorcycles, but on airplane engines instead. He was thrilled. He reported for duty at John Connally Air Force Base near Waco, Texas.

**Commented [LE22]:** Military: skills acquired

**Commented [LE23]:** Military: Stationed at

Abner had a first cousin, Elvira Simpson, who lived in Mexia, a town a little bit east of Waco. Elvie's best friend was a girl named Abigail Thwaite. Abigail lived in nearby Teague, Texas. There was a high school dance coming up, and the girls set each other up with their cousins.

**Commented [LE24]:** Family Member (extended)

**Commented [LE25]:** Personality trait of Abner's wife.

**Commented [LE26]:** How Abner met his wife Abigail

That dance was Abner and Abigail's first date, and they found they, well, liked each other. When the Air Force transferred Abner to aircraft mechanics school at Sheppard Air Force Base in Wichita Falls, Texas, he continued to travel to the Teague/Mexia area to see Abigail. They married April 18, 1954.

**Commented [LE27]:** Pause for laughter and/or sobbing of the happy kind. The story of Abner and Abigail's romance is emotionally moving.

**Commented [LE28]:** Military: Stationed at

**Commented [LE29]:** Wedding Date

At Sheppard, Abner mastered the skill of repairing aircraft engine electrical systems and started to teach this skill to newer recruits. He was promoted to Staff Sergeant and was ordered to report to the U.S. Air Force Base in Wiesbaden, occupied West Germany.

**Commented [LE30]:** Military: rank

**Commented [LE31]:** Military: stationed at

**Commented [LE32]:** History: at that time, W. Germany was still "occupied" by the Allies after WW II

He thought he was going to fix airplane engines, but not long after he arrived, the General who commanded the Base found out that Abner could touch type 80 words per minute. Abner was hijacked into being the General's secretary. As an American, he could get the top-secret security clearance required to handle the extremely sensitive information in the commander's office, information that could not be revealed to the

civilian German women who made up the ordinary secretarial pool.

Abner's Mom wrote him - she was worried that he had gotten into serious trouble. The FBI had come to Longview asking questions about him to everyone who knew him. Mama Belle was terrified! She was relieved to find out when he wrote her back that this was only a routine investigation for Abner's security clearance.

The Air Force flew bombers loaded with atomic bombs out of Wiesbaden, which is a base that could have been overrun in a couple of days if the Soviet Union had invaded, using the autobahn that was a straight shot from the Soviet-occupied Czechoslovakian border.

Here he was, right on the edge of the mountainous region of Germany called Bavaria - in mid-Winter, just as the Cold War was looking like it would not be cold for long. But he was freezing his you-know-what off. He had never been so cold and had never seen snow measured in feet instead of an inch or two.

Commented [LE33]: Military: Story 2

Abner proved himself to be quite popular among the officers he worked with. He did not drink alcohol, nor did he smoke tobacco - and although he could have sold the coupons issued by the military that could be redeemed for these vices, he just as often gave them away. They loved him for that, even the General.

Commented [LE34]: Statement of fundamental character

When it came time for his Abby to come over to Germany and live with him in Wiesbaden, the General insisted that he take the General's car and driver to pick her up at the airport. This is a car that had fender flags - it looked like someone very important was riding inside.

Other officer's wives arrived on the same airplane as Abigail. Abigail was a very young woman, still in her teens, and the other wives asked her what her husband's rank was in the Air Force. She told them she thought he was a Sergeant.

When Abner came out of the back seat of the General's car - he had been told to dress in civilian clothes instead of his uniform - he greeted Abigail, and they started back to the car. He overheard one of them say "That poor, stupid country girl - she doesn't even know that her husband is a General!"

Commented [LE35]: Pause for laughter

Commented [LE36]: Military: Story 3

As winter turned to spring, and spring turned to summer, the General wanted to throw a big cookout for the officers. He had a problem, though - he had no charcoal. He asked Abner if he could find some charcoal for his barbeque.

Abner started looking - there was none on base, and not a brick of it even close. He started working the phones - word had gotten out that Abner had given out a huge amount of favors, and each person he talked to wanted to return those favors. He found the General a little bit of charcoal and asked him where he would like it delivered. The General - thinking that Abner had just found a barrel or two -- told him to just put

it next to the headquarters building.

When a dump-truck full of charcoal left a huge pile where the General wanted it, he was surprised - and shocked.

Abner Tolly had come through for him, going miles and miles beyond the call of duty. He was that kind of guy.

**Commented [LE37]:** Military: Story 4

Abner always did more than what was required. After he returned from Germany, and with his father in failing health, he helped them turn Tolly Furniture into a much bigger enterprise, Tolly's TV and Appliances. He built a thriving business based on service unexcelled by anyone. The spirit of great service was his reputation, his word, his gold.

**Commented [LE38]:** Statement of fundamental character

**Commented [LE39]:** His Business Career

**Commented [LE40]:** Statement of fundamental character

He could not be pried away from that live wire that was his wife Abigail, not even with a 2 x 4. He loved her with all his heart and sacrificed his own health in taking care of her when her health declined. He never failed in the vows he made to her.

**Commented [LE41]:** Abigail was described to us as having a vibrant personality, and her mastery of profanity would make a sailor blush.

Theirs was an affair for the ages. Those who knew Abby know that there isn't much of what she often would say to - or sometimes yell at -- him that would be appropriate to recount here - um, her vocabulary was not exactly suitable for children and other living things - but she loved him with all her heart, too.

**Commented [LE42]:** Pause for laughter – a nervous twittering from those who did not know Abigail well, and a belly-laugh from those who did.

**Commented [LE43]:** Marriage

When she passed away, it took him some time to adjust. He missed her terribly, but he remained his cheerful, affable self despite the challenges life threw at him.

**Commented [LE44]:** Death of Spouse

**Commented [LE45]:** Abner had both serious health and financial challenges

He loved his children - Joshua, Jerry and Eve --more than any of you know, even if he could not put his feelings into words.

**Commented [LE46]:** Statement of love for children

**Commented [LE47]:** Names of children

Abner loved dogs as much if not more than people, and he was a people person. He fondly recounted memories of the Boston Terrier, named Peggy, that he had as a child. This was the dog who got him in trouble with his mom when he was selling candy and cokes at Tolly's Trading Post. Inventory was disappearing, particularly of a taffy sucker called a BB Bat. His mom scolded him for eating them, and she warned him that he would get the "sugar" - what diabetes was called then - if he kept eating them like that. It turns out that little Peggy was pinching the BB Bats.

**Commented [LE48]:** Animal lover

**Commented [LE49]:** Dog Story 1, from childhood

He had a lot of dogs over the years, from a big white German Shepherd named Omar to Wolfie, and he loved to look after Eve's dogs Dewey and Pig whom he spoiled rotten whenever they came up to "Camp PawPaw." They loved their PawPaw, too, since he would always give them ice cream along with way too many other treats. There wasn't a dog he met that he didn't spoil, whether Missy, Dalai, or the dog who spent the last couple of years with him, our dog Seamus - who added a few pounds since Abner moved in with us.

**Commented [LE50]:** Dog Story 2: his grand puppies



Abner never shut his mouth until now.

**Commented [LE51]:** This is an inside joke to all who knew him well. Pause for audience laughter. He was described to us as a motormouth.

That man could talk . . . and talk . . . and talk. Sometimes yammering on to the point of annoyance, but I tell you what - I'm sure that I'm not alone in missing the sound of his voice.

**Commented [LE52]:** Reconnect phrase

Again, he hated to have people fuss over him, but I am going to recite a little Shakespeare - hear that, Abner? - as I close my fussing over you. This is from Act III, Scene 1 of the play "Hamlet:"

**Commented [LE53]:** Transition to close of speech, back to the theme of making a fuss over him.

**Commented [LE54]:** Shakespearean quote.

"To die, to sleep;  
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;  
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come  
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,  
Must give us pause: there's the respect  
That makes calamity of so long life."

Shakespeare used the wrong word. He should have used the word "wonder" instead of "calamity."

**Commented [LE55]:** Application of Quote to the man.

For that was who Abner Glen Tolly was - a true wonder who lived a wonderful life.

**Commented [LE56]:** Closing line.