

I have many favorite photos of Paul Swift, my grandpa. Some of them aren't actual photos—just vivid snapshots in my memory.

There's grandpa standing over a stove at Christmastime, making me my first bowl of what would become one of my favorite treats: applesauce with melted red hot candies.



There's grandpa at my high school graduation party, out on the back porch surrounded by teenagers who sit in a semi-circle at his feet, gazing up adoringly at him as he talks about literature, mathematics, art and classical music.

There's grandpa sitting in the cool, airy library at the house in Maine where we had two reunions, happily holding baby Monica in a beam of sunlight. You, too, can probably imagine a favorite picture of Paul Swift holding a baby; grandpa *loved* holding babies.

One mental picture I have of grandpa comes from the notes he recently wrote up from his time as a soldier during WWII. The way he wrote it makes this another vivid snapshot, and it's one I find myself coming back to again and again since he passed away on Monday. In an entry from Manila dated August 28, 1945, Paul Swift writes:

"We moved to a much better site on the coast. We spent much time in the ocean. We took our big mattress bags, wet them and ran with them to blow them up. The end was tied in a knot and the result was a big float. I laid on mine and went paddling out into the ocean. Everything went well until I noticed I was far from shore. I cannot swim so if the knot in my mattress came undone I was a goner. Somehow the water washed me up on the beach.

I had left my shoes near a bamboo-and-stick shack, and not only were [the shoes] not there, but I didn't recognize any of the other soldiers as my friends. I was certain that I had died.

Only later did I see another shack some distance down the beach. There I found my shoes and my buddies. How good it was to find that I was alive after all!"

On March 9, 2009, Paul Swift floated away from shore one more time. He paddled out onto the waters of a lifetime of memories: that makeshift mattress-bag float in the Pacific Ocean, the smell of bananas coming from the port in Panama, London rains, cold shocks of ocean over rocky beaches in Maine, Fourth of July bonfires reflected on Conesus Lake, and sunsets sparkling on the Gulf of Mexico. These waters flowed together into a source water: the water of his baptism.

The water that bathed his head in promises, that carried and sustained him through his life of faith, now carried him even farther from shore. It was the only shore he'd ever known, and he couldn't swim. No one could swim this one on their own. That's frightening. But the promises that were made to Paul in baptism—that he is a child of God, that his sins are forgiven, and that he will share in the resurrection hope of eternal life—these promises are the most reliable flotation device, ever.

And just like the ocean on that August day in Manila, these waters of life and baptism brought Paul safely to a beach. When he got to the beach in Manila, he was greeted by strangers: they weren't the soldiers he knew and had come to call his friends (and they didn't know where his shoes were, either). This time, when he reached the *heavenly* shore, Grandpa Swift was welcomed by a God who is no stranger to him. God has known and loved Paul completely, his whole life, and God has been with him through every moment of his life. I imagine God giving Grandpa a warm, loving welcome and Grandpa saying, "Uh huh, well! It's good to see you, too!"

Grandpa wrote: "I was certain that I had died. Only later did I see another shack some distance down the beach. There I found my shoes and my buddies. How good it was to find that I was alive after all!"

Sixty-four years after this experience on the ocean, Paul Swift died. He was carried safely to that distant shore by the promises of his baptism, the hope of the resurrection, and the prayers and loving thoughts of his family and friends. Some of these family and friends are here today, some join in spirit from their homes across the country and around the world, and some of the saints who have gone before are with us, too, part of the great cloud of witnesses.

Together we gather to grieve and celebrate. Together, we hold tight to each other even as we let go. Waving our damp tissues, we say "bon voyage, rest in peace. We love you. We miss you. We will remember you, always." And we join Grandpa in saying: "How good it is to be alive, after all!" How good it is for Grandpa Swift, as he starts this new, eternal life with God.

Let us pray:

Loving God, we are missing our grandpa, father, husband, brother and friend, Paul Swift. Thank you for welcoming him to his heavenly home, to his new life on a new shore, with all your love and compassion for him. Be with us as we mourn our loss, celebrate his amazing life, and give thanks for his new life with you. We pray, trusting in your mercy, Amen.

