

Thomas Simone: larger than life. Yes, he really was one of those men who are larger than life. I suppose you expect to hear that from his son at a funeral eulogy? This isn't mere encomium; he truly was larger than life. And those of you sitting here know this is really no exaggeration.

Each of us has the chance to meet one or two folks in our life that we know are really quite different. We'll look back and say, "Do you remember 'X'? He really was distinct from anyone I've known." And that was Thomas Simone.

He stood apart. As a poor, depression era lad scrapping in the streets of Providence, RI, he stood apart. And, as a young teenager digging wells and cesspools for his Dad in Providence and Block Island, he stood apart. Joining the Army Air Corp at the end of WWII, he stood apart as an Airmen and a gifted pilot. He used to brag that when he landed his C-130 his landings were so feather-soft, the crewman in back would ask on the radio, "Colonel Simone, have we landed yet?" As an officer in the Air Force, retiring after 30 years he stood apart for he had no college education and it was amazing he made it as far as Colonel! Then, at his retirement in Prescott, AZ, he went every week to US Motors looking for a job. HR told him week after week they had nothing. Finally, exasperated, the clerk told him he had only a janitor's job. "I'll take it," my Dad said. And sure enough, he started as a janitor and within a few years he was foreman of the entire shop floor! And, with no formal training, he worked as a respected industrial engineer at Revlon in Phoenix, teaching the company how to package products more efficiently.

Standing apart. A good theme for this eulogy. Standing apart as an officer and pilot, a friend, neighbor and co-worker, and as a husband and father. Thomas Simone, standing apart.

He stood apart for his integrity. To this day not one of his 6 kids can leave a store with too much change; they have to go back and let the clerk they were undercharged. That was Dad. Driving 10 miles back to the store to tell them he got too much change.

Here was a man who spent many long months away from home as an Air Force pilot. And yet he remained faithful to my Mom. Wishful thinking on the part of an admiring son? No. Ask his peers who so respected his integrity. He attracted friends with that same integrity. And, when he was away for as long as a year, he wrote my mother every single day. A faithful husband.

Thomas Simone also stood apart for his sense of humor. If this room was filled with chattering people and Dad laughed, he would silence the room. His laugh was distinctive and contagious. He loved to laugh and to joke. And He loved to laugh at himself. I was just reviewing the videotape of his retirement ceremony from Revlon. A character as large as my Dad offered lots of fodder for a roast. And roast him the Revlon folks did. And who was laughing loudest at his own roast? Dad! You could hear that distinctive laugh in the background through then entire ceremony.

And he loved to brag. I say brag, not boast because there was never any arrogance in his bragging. He bragged with a twinkle in his eye, and everyone listening would wink at each other because there was tremendous humility under that bragging.

Dad also stood apart for his generosity. He had a heart as large as this church building. He was incapable of holding a grudge. He had been hurt by family and acquaintances, superiors and friends, but he never held on to his hurts. He was always taken advantage of, but he didn't care.

He loved to help. I mean, he really loved to help others. He'd help strangers. He was a runner, and later when his knees hurt, he'd bicycle around the neighborhood. And if he saw you digging a hole in your front yard to plant a cactus or run an irrigation line, he'd ask, "Have you got another shovel? I'll help you." He loved to help his neighbors. Some of you are here. One elderly neighbor who didn't know how to change a washer would call the house with an emergency with the greeting, "911," and my mom would know she'd have to send Dad down the block. If your water heater went out he'd be there until he dropped at midnight or 1 AM. Then he'd wake up early, off to the plumbing store to get parts, and he'd be back again the next day until he finished. How

often Mom waited with dinner while my Dad was helping someone. But, he wasn't like the plumber who fixed everyone else's kitchen but did nothing at home. He was just as quick to help my Mom, Aggie, or a daughter or brother-in-law.

He was the Patriarch. The father of 6 and grandfather of 29. And, if I may say in the same spirit as Dad would have bragged, he raised 6 really solid kids. I'm reminded of a story about an airline pilot, back in the 70s when some were concerned about overpopulation, who had quite a few children. One woman challenged him about whether it was responsible to have so many kids and he replied, "Ma'am, the world needs the kind of kids that I have." That should have been Dad's response.

This also sounds sentimental and saccharine. And I've never liked those kinds of eulogies. Yes, Dad was a sinner like all of us. He could be very hard on those around him. I should know: I was his firstborn! And Aggie, my Mom, would know, too. But he mellowed with age and became wiser and more patient. And because he could not keep a grudge, and because he had that very unusual combination of a soft-heart, no one else could begrudge him either.

We recognized that he could be hard on other because he was so hard on himself. He had very high standards and was often haunted because he himself failed those standards.

Thomas Simone was famous among his Air Force peers for an incident while he was flying C-130 Spectre aircraft along the Ho Chi Minh trail in 1969. This was dangerous work as this C-130 flew at night by infra-red, picking out convoys carrying arms to kill our young men. Dad would locate them, and drop flaming logs to identify the targets to the F-4s could destroy them. The AAA (anti-aircraft artillery) fire was like a rainstorm; Dad lost several friends who piloted these 130s. On night in May 1969, AAA fire hit the aircraft killing the illumination engineer. Dad was able to get most of the crew to bail over the Laotian border, but some of the men decided to stay and help get the aircraft in. The plane came in on three engines to Ubon, Thailand and the final engine went out just before landing. The landing was astonishing; Lockheed, builder of

the C-130, later said that is just wasn't possible to land that aircraft under those conditions. But land it Dad did. At impact, the aircraft broke in half, killing one crewman. Dad and several others made it out just in time to see then 130 explode in flames with ammunition firing off like July 4th. His crew were all so grateful to Dad for saving their lives. They said his skills and courage were amazing. But is that what Dad thought of? No. He thought about those two crewmen he lost. It haunted him with nightmares until the day he died. Those were his high standards; that was how tough he was on himself.

That was what made him such a large figure. He was a big paradox. Integrity, humor and generosity, but tough as nails and soft as jello. He was a diamond, hammered out of a tough family life, in the rough streets of depression era Providence, RI. But a diamond he was.

But finally, this is not just about Thomas Simone. A good man he was, but if this is all we can say where is our hope? After all, when any of us die even those who knew us will be hard pressed to remember the details of our life in ten years. And in 15 or 20 we'll be forgotten. But God doesn't forget.

This is a time to remember the resurrection of the dead. I was stunned just a few minutes ago when Father Matthew, in his homily, discussed Jesus and Lazarus in the gospel of John, chapter 11. That was just what I wanted to talk about now.

Jesus young friend Lazarus died after an illness. His sisters, Martha and Mary, sent for him because they knew he had been miraculously healing folks. But Jesus came four days too late. Martha reproached him and said if he'd been there her brother would not have died. Jesus then tells her that Lazarus would rise again. Martha says, "I know he will rise again on the last day." And Jesus tells her that he himself is the resurrection and the life. "Whoever believes in me, though he dies, yet will he live." And this is what makes a Christian funeral not hopeless but bittersweet. For those who understand Jesus is the savior and trust him, they have the hope of a brand new body at the last day. Not and airy, fairy soul floating with angels, but a brand new body that Jesus Christ will give him, a body that will no longer age or be corrupted, in a

new heaven and new earth where, as John the apostle say, righteousness dwells. Yes, we have the sadness of Dad gone; but we know the resurrection of the dead. Not bitter, but bittersweet.

I want to read you something we found in Dad's wallet. It's a card with a little cross and a poem:

I carry a cross in my pocket
A simple reminder to me
Of the fact that I am a Christian
No matter where I may be.

This little cross is not magic
Nor is it a good luck charm
It isn't meant to protect me
From every physical harm.

It's not for identification
For all the world to see
It's simply an understanding
Between my savior and me.

When I put my hand in my pocket
To bring out a coin or a key
The Cross is there to remind me
Of the price He paid for me.

It reminds me, too, to be thankful
For my blessings day by day
And to strive to serve Him better
In all that I do and say.

It's also a daily reminder

Of the peace and comfort I share
With all who know my Master
And give themselves to His care.

So, I carry a cross in my pocket
Reminding no one but me
That Jesus Christ is Lord of my live
If only I'll let Him be.

Until later, goodbye Old Soldier.