

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

207

Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will deal with the late Paul Anderson. He was often referred to as the "strongest man in the world". When your parents were in high school, Paul came to Carthage and did a demonstration in the high school auditorium. He amazed everyone by lifting a platform with the whole cheer leading squad on it. He also drove nails into a board with his bare hands and performed other incredible demonstrations of strength.

Paul was born in Toccoa, Georgia, the only son of Ethel and Robert Anderson. He began his early weight training in their back yard. He used homemade weights with a tractor axle as a bar. His father made weights by pouring concrete into wooden forms. When the family moved to Elizabethton, Tennessee he met weightlifter Bob Peeples who gave him some tips and also introduced him to weightlifting circles. His hard work and natural ability combined to make him a champion.

In 1955, as winner of the USA National Athletic Weightlifting Championship, he was privileged to travel to the Soviet Union to compete. On a rainy night with 15,000 spectators Soviet champion Alexey Medvedev matched the Olympic record with an amazing lift of 330.5 lbs. Paul was scheduled to lift next. Since the rules forbade him from lifting less than Medvedev, they apologized, assuming that Paul was now out of the competition. He surprised them, however, by asked that they add over 70 lbs. to the bar. The snickers of the audience turned to silence, then to awe, and finally to explosive applause. This young new comer to the sport set a world record by lifting 402.5 lbs. At the time this was the heaviest weight ever lifted overhead in human history.

Later in 1955 Paul set two more world records in Munich, Germany. (407.7 lbs. In a single lift and 1,129.5 lbs. in combination). Obviously, he easily won the competition in his weight class. In 1956 he won a gold medal at the Olympic Games in Melbourne, Australia. He won the gold in spite of being sick and running a temperature of 104 degrees.

The Guinness Book of World Records lists his feat of lifting 6,270 pounds in a back lift as the greatest weight ever raised by a human being. A granite marker commemorating this feat is in front of his old house in Toccoa.

As a devout Christian Paul and his wife Glenda were more concerned about helping those in need than fame and fortune. This led them to found the Paul Anderson Youth Home in Vidalia, Georgia. This was a ministry for troubled youth between the ages of 16 and 21 who would otherwise have been in prison. Before his death Anderson helped over 2,000 young men by means of this ministry. To help fund the work Paul turned pro and did as many as 500 appearances per year.

Incredibly, Paul suffered from a chronic illness. As a child he was diagnosed from Bright's disease. Today this illness is known as "chronic nephritis". This chronic kidney disease eventually took his life. Paul died August 15, 1994. He was only 61 years old.

Paul was famous for saying that if the strongest man in the world needs Jesus, maybe you do too! This is something that everyone ought to seriously consider.

Reflecting on the life of Paul Anderson reminds me of the words of wise King Solomon as he concluded the book of Ecclesiastes. This book, as you know, reflects the efforts of Solomon to find fulfillment and to understand the purpose of life. After a life time of experimenting, Solomon, the richest man in the world, concluded: **“Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgement, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil” (Eccl. 12:13, 14).**

In this regard the richest man in the world and the strongest man in the world had something in common. Both realized that earthly achievements and honors mean nothing in eternity. When we die the only thing that really matters is our relationship with God. Therefore: **“Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power” (Eph. 6:10).** Fearing God and keeping His commandments is the whole duty of man.

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce