

Swen Russel Swensen, M.D.

October 17, 1937 ~ May 2, 2024

Swen Russel Swensen, M.D. was born on October 17, 1937, to Russel and Beulah (Strickler) Swensen in Provo, Utah, the oldest of four children. In his youth, he learned the value of hard work, education, and fun. He attended Brigham Young Elementary, B.Y. Junior High, graduated from B.Y. High, and Brigham Young University. Swen was true blue.

As a young man, Swen was called to serve in the Swiss-Austrian Mission for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Despite having Swiss grandparents, he was assigned to serve in Austria, which he came to love with all of his heart. His mission experience changed his life, planted a testimony in his heart, and solidified his commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It also provided lifelong friendships including the Swiss-Austrian Missionary Fireside Group which has met together in love and friendship nearly every month for six decades (and counting).

Swen lived a life of service, which he passed on through his example. He always gave to those in need and selflessly gave of himself. During his church service he faithfully served in a variety of capacities including as bishop of the Monument Park 14th Ward. Like his father, he was a gifted teacher, and, after retirement, loved serving in the Salt Lake Temple.

In 1969, Swen graduated from the George Washington University School of Medicine and then completed a residency in general surgery at the University of Utah School of Medicine. For Swen, being a surgeon and trauma doctor was, in essence, a sacred calling. Through great personal sacrifices, he gave the best decades of his life to helping those in need and in pain, regardless of who they were. There are forgettable doctors; Dr. Swensen was not one of them. He was known for his kind, bed-side manner, steady hand, humor, and dedicated service. There will be many reading these words who were cared for by Dr. Swensen, whether as a patient at his beloved LDS Hospital or as a friend or neighbor needing stitches at the kitchen table. All can attest to his warm spirit, gentleness, and the extra stitch which always helped make it “look a little better.” Swen is evidence that Christ-like service can extend to every corner of one’s life.

In Washington D.C. during medical school, Swen met Gretel Foxley who almost instantly became the love of his life. Three years later on September 4, 1970, they were married in the Salt Lake Temple and together established a family based on the gospel, love, service, and having fun. Soon they welcomed five children into their home, who knew that their father loved and supported them.

In 1993, Swen was called to return to Austria as mission president along with Gretel and their children. Through this experience, Swen extended his love and service to his beloved missionaries and deepened his love for the people and Saints of Austria as well as Slovenia, Serbia, Croatia, and Albania, whom he was also called to serve.

Swen loved his traditions including going to Newport Beach and getting donuts with his kids and grandkids. He treasured gathering his family on Christmas Eve to eat schnitzel and shrimp, read Luke 2, and sing Stille Nacht (Silent Night). Swen loved to travel and joyed in bringing his family and friends to the places he loved. He also loved adventure, which included climbing mountains with his children. The Grand Teton, Matterhorn, Kilimanjaro, and Everest Basecamp number among his proud achievements. Swen simply believed he could “have it all.” Even late in his life, as vascular dementia ravaged his mind and body, he loved to reminisce of the great adventure that was his life.

Swen passed away on May 2, 2024, at home among family. He is survived by his “angel wife” Gretel and their five children: James (Katie), Gretel (Curtis) Sampson, Kirsten (David) Corbett, Cathrine (Brennan) Snow, and Matt (Gretchen Schettler), his fourteen grandchildren (Kate [Colton], Lucy [McLain], Jacob, Anna, Sally, Maxwell, Lily, Andrew, Ella, Jack, Meg, Marta, William, Poppy) who will miss their Papa dearly, and his three siblings: Shauna Weight, Laird Swensen (Gloria), and Ann Sumner (Greg). He is preceded in death by his parents, Russel and Beulah Swensen, his in-laws Mel and Beth Foxley, his brother-in-law David Weight, and a host of family and dear friends. Somewhere in heaven the old bottle band is back, making music together again.

Godspeed dear husband, father, Papa, friend, and “Bruder.” We can’t wait to see you, healthy and whole, once again. Auf Wiedersehen.

A viewing will be held Friday, May 10, 2024, from 6:00pm to 8:00pm at the Salt Lake Wasatch Stake, 1930 South 2100 East. Funeral services will be Saturday May 11, 2024, at 11:00 am, with a viewing beginning at 9:30 am at the same meeting house. Interment will follow at Larkin Sunset Lawn, 2350 East 1300 South in Salt Lake City.

In lieu of flowers, please make donations to the Highland High School Pantry, which serves underprivileged students and their families. https://highland.slcschools.org/community/family-support