

Elmer Baumgarten

*By Steve Baumgarten, Julie Baumgarten and Arlissa Powell
Presented at the 2014 Summer Celebration by Dean Petersen*

Hello and welcome. My name is Elmer Fred Henry Baumgarten. I bought the funeral home in Hartley in June of 1960, and moved here from Sutherland with my wife Julie, son Steve, and daughters Carole and Lori. I lived here until 1995, and those were the best 35 years of my life.

I was born on January 19, 1919, to Albert and Minnie Baumgarten on their farm in Nodaway Township, rural Page County, Iowa, near Clarinda. I attended a rural one-room school across the road from my home. The teacher found me to be a quick learner and ended up promoting me two grades ahead of my classmates. For seventh and eighth grades, I went to Immanuel Lutheran School, five miles from my home. When the weather was bad, I stayed during the week with my cousin, Arlissa, and we became good friends as well as cousins. About this time, my parents bought a farm east of Clarinda on the Nodaway River and I attended high school in Clarinda, graduating in 1934 when I was fifteen years old.

One of my best friends was the undertaker's son. I liked the big cars he drove and didn't mind the dead bodies. My friend would come out to the farm and do my chores and I would go to the funeral home and help his dad.

Then came Pearl Harbor. Of course, I enlisted, but they wouldn't take me because of my scar tissue on my lungs. They said I had silicosis, and I didn't even know I had it. The doctor said I should get off the farm and consider becoming an undertaker.

To become a funeral director, I had to work a year as an apprentice in Clinton, Iowa. Then I attended embalming school for a year in St. Louis. I drove an ambulance in the city at that time and have always been a safe and fast driver. Then I worked another year as an apprentice in Webster City, Iowa. After that, I went to work at the funeral home in Jewell, Iowa. And that is where the fun began.

I saw a beautiful girl almost every day and found out she was a school teacher. We met, dated, and then were married on August 27, 1944 at Hubbard, Iowa. She was Ula Mae Thomas, but everyone knows her as Julie. We moved to Sutherland, Iowa, where we bought the funeral home and had our three children. During that time I started a television business and ran the ambulance. We also had a gift shop and an Ironrite franchise, which Julie demonstrated in the front window of the gift shop on Main Street. I was a Boy Scout leader and very active in the Funeral Director's State Association, serving as President in 1955. I was later honored as a fifty-year member.

Then we moved to Hartley and I became active in this community. I helped start the Meadowbrook Golf Course and the Community Memorial Hospital, serving on both boards, as well as the O'Brien County School Board.

I especially enjoyed bowling and once had a game of 299. Fishing was always a passion of mine and every year we vacationed in Minnesota, mostly at Leach Lake. I took my father and my son on a fly-in fishing trip to Canada. Thirty years later, my son, my grandson and I went into northern Canada to fish, and my grandson caught a trophy fish.

At the age of 56, I soloed an airplane and got my pilot's license, fulfilling a life-long dream. I flew almost four thousand hours, a lot of them following the basketball team coached by my daughter, Carole, who was on staff at Drake University.

I had a lot of friends here and served many of them when they had a death in the family. You have to be able to bury your friends, because your enemies won't call you. I loved my work and loved the people. The Lutheran Church was a big part of my life, and my faith was very important to me. I served at St. Paul's on numerous boards and committees.

In 1995, Julie and I moved to Des Moines for a year, then to Las Vegas for a year, and then settled in Tucson, Arizona. I loved the warm weather, golfed often, bowled twice a week and enjoyed life to the fullest. I was diagnosed with lung cancer in 2001, and died on May 4th of that year. I await you all in my Heavenly Home. My wife, Julie is healthy and well, living in Tucson.

I have a great many friends buried right here at this cemetery. Death is a part of life, but not the final chapter. Eternity awaits us all.

Thanks for stopping by and hearing about me. Enjoy the day.