

Published July 8th, 2020

## Larry Swindell now with the stars he loved so well

By Sophie Braccini



Larry Swindell in front a picture of his younger self in the Rheem Theatre Hall of Fame Photo courtesy Julie Bookman-Swindell

When Larry Swindell closed his eyes for the last time in his Moraga residence on June 23, a few days after his 91st birthday, one of the last witnesses and chroniclers of Hollywood's Golden Age was gone. Swindell had walked with Cary Grant, Colette Colbert, Carol Lombard, Humphrey Bogart and Katharine Hepburn, to name just a few. He wrote five movie star biographies, some bestsellers, he taught numerous cinema and journalism college classes and contributed to many publications. Cinema, baseball, books and faith were the passions that drove his long and rich life.

According to Julie Swindell, the eldest of his five children, her father had his first heart problem at age 63, but this did not stop him from continuing living life to the fullest for almost another 30 years. One just had to step into the Moraga or Orinda movie theater when he was introducing a classic movie for matinee viewers to feel his passion: for a while you were with Vincente Minelli directing "An American In Paris" or alongside John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara during the shooting of "The Quiet Man."

Swindell's memory was phenomenal in each of his three passions of baseball, books, and the movies - especially the early years of the American industry to the '60s. He could give the name of any professional baseball player and their entire stats, his daughter says. At his 91st birthday dinner a few days before his heart finally stopped during his sleep, he asked his assembled children to quiz him on movie stars and the most minute details of their careers, and he got everything right.

During the last years of his life, Swindell embarked on a monumental task of writing the history of American cinema from its early silent days; he had just finished the year 1942 when he died. His work included 1939, the year he considered the pinnacle of Hollywood Golden Age; his elder daughter is now tasked with finishing the huge document that Swindell viewed as a future reference manual for scholastic research. Julie Swindell

is also editing her father's autobiography, "Naked on the Freeway."

Swindell leaves behind his second wife, Pat, their children and the many grandchildren on both sides that considered him their grandpa, and many friends. He was a very active member of the Moraga Kiwanis, and of the Historical Society, for which he was the editor of the El Rancho Moraga quarterly for 10 years. His friend, former council member Howard Harpham, remembers the weekly breakfasts every Monday morning with Swindell and Kirpal Khanna. At these breakfasts, they would discuss the previous Sunday's sermons at their respective churches, Swindell holding hands with the two of them and giving a blessing over pancakes and juice, always including Khanna's Shikh religion.

The movie scholar had had a very long and productive life before his Lamorinda days as a drama critic, film scholar, musical librettist, magazine editor, theatrical producer, teacher, movie biographer, baseball know-all, and book maven. The UCLA grad created the book review section at the Philadelphia Inquirer and was one of the eight founding directors of the National Book Critics Circle. At the Fort Worth Star-Telegram his books section expanded to four pages, and his "Bookshelf" column was syndicated by the New York Times for 10 years. Swindell's biographies of Spencer Tracy, Carol Lombard (his best seller), Gary Cooper, Charles Boyer, and John Garfield (the one he found the most profound) were recently republished and are available online and in all good bookstores.

Swindell had five children with his first wife, but lost her to cancer and was a bachelor for many years. Then at his 50-year class reunion he reunited with Pat, who had been his sweetheart when they were 11 years old. Swindell left his Texas home for Pat, took early retirement and moved to Moraga, which he considered to be heaven on earth.

"All of it was rewarding and fun," he wrote to his daughter Julie, "and blessed with marriage to the two most stimulating women I have known, and three daughters and two sons who are my everlasting glory." His wife Pat noted that their shared faith was a central part of their relationship, and she called their 22-year marriage a golden age of love, concern and fun.

A memorial ceremony will be organized at a later date, when it is safe for all to attend.

Julie Bookman Swindell contributed to this article.

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