

The Greatest Influence in My Life



Dad talking with new archery recruits at a family reunion

By David Carrigan, July 6, 2018

My father, Richard "Dick" Carrigan, has been the greatest influence in my life. He has touched me in many ways and he will always be a hero to me. I think he's amazing. He is a god-fearing, humble man with a colorful background and impressive personal history. I'm most impressed with his love for God and country, but he's also a devoted family man who loves archery. His interest in archery began when he was very young, after he watched a Western movie in the theatre. It was an action movie with cowboys and Indians and it excited him because the Indians used bows and arrows. He loved the movie so much that his favorite expression became "If it's not a Western, it's not a good movie".

My dad's father, Andrew "Andy" Carrigan worked as a teacher and coach at Charlotte High School. He had a strong influence on my dad, much the same way my dad had a strong influence on me. Dad's mother is Gertrude "Marie" Wildern. She worked as a phone operator for many years at AT&T. My grandparents were married in April 1921 and they had two boys: Andrew, born in 1922 and my father, Richard James born in 1925. Andrew died about age 8 after a bad fall in the school gymnasium.

The same year my dad was born, the family moved to Sturgis, Michigan where my grandfather would coach the Sturgis High School basketball team and take them to a Class B state championship.



Oil Painting of "The Deer Hunter" by David Carrigan

My grandfather, "Andy", died tragically at the age of 33 after contracting tuberculosis. Dad was only 7 years old at the time, yet he faced the anguish of losing a parent shortly after losing an older brother. After my grandfather died, the family moved back to Charlotte. A few years later dad attended Charlotte High School where his dad was once a teacher and coach. Dad played football, basketball, ran track, and he boxed. It was there that my parents met. My mother is Mildred Skinner. She's the youngest of 4 and has 3 older brothers. Her father had a large farm several miles outside of Charlotte.

After my parents were married, dad held several jobs including working for Oldsmobile in Lansing, but he retired from a factory named Aluminum Extrusion located close to home in Charlotte. My parents have four children: Daniel James, David Michael, Jeanne Marie, and Lorna.

When dad was 11, he was introduced to an older gentleman named, Waldo Sherman, who was also interested in archery and he made his own archery equipment. Waldo is the one that first taught dad how to fashion his own bow and arrows the traditional way. Over the years dad has become a skilled craftsman and his work is outstanding. He starts by ripping down a pine board and rounding off the corners with a hand-held planer to make his own shafts. Then, he applies knocker tips, feathers and finishes them off with a beautiful paint job. The final product is a true work of art. He also makes beautiful self-

bow (or stick bow) out of a variety of different woods. In addition, he has made some very nice primitive style quivers.

In 1943, at the height of WWII when dad was still in high school, he was drafted by the U.S. Army. They were interested in him because he was an athlete and he was in great shape. The Army was kind enough to wait until he played his last football game before they enlisted him, but they didn't let him graduate. Instead, they sent him to Europe for 22 months where he was assigned to fight with the 559th US Army Artillery Group. He drove a truck with a 50-caliber machine gun attached and he became a carbine sharp-shooter. In the second year of his enlistment, when he was only 19, he took part in the third wave of the Allied invasion of German-occupied France that landed on Omaha Beach in Normandy, June 6, 1944 "D-Day". American troops landing at Omaha Beach suffered heavy casualties because the coast was strongly defended by the Germans. Six months later, dad fought in the Battle of the Bulge (The Ardennes Offensive: Dec. 16, 1944 - Jan. 25, 1945), and he fought in the *Northern France Campaign*, July 1944. The following year he fought in his fourth battle in an area *along the Rhine River in West Germany* commonly known as Rhineland. His fifth and last battle known as the *Central Europe Campaign* started when Western Allies crossed the Rhine River on 22 March 1945. They fanned-out and overpowered Western Germany from the Baltic in the north, to Austria in the south and six weeks later, on May 8, 1945, the Germans surrendered.



Pen and Ink Drawing by David Carrigan

For his bravery, dad received several medals including the European Theater Ribbon with five bronze stars, a Good Conduct Medal and a WWII Victory Medal. I am so proud of my dad for the sacrifices he made for this country. To me, he's a real hero.

Before going into the Army, dad attended Charlotte High School in Charlotte, Michigan. That's where he developed a love for sports and that's where he first learned to box. He continued boxing when he was in the military and he stayed with it after he got out. His persistence paid off, because he eventually became a middle-weight Golden Gloves champion. He loved it so much that he started a boxing club in Nashville, Michigan. My brother, Dan and I both joined and both of us learned to love boxing as well. Dad was a big influence on both of us. He was a good teacher and he was committed to teaching us boxing and archery. With his coaching, Dan and I both took state in Golden Gloves. Dan really excelled at the sport and was light heavyweight champion three times. In my opinion, Dan was one of the top amateur boxers in the world and I was real proud of him. My Dad and my older brother were both a big influence in my life.

My early memories of archery include dad making arrows in his basement workshop. I can also remember him putting up targets all over our 19 acres. Eventually, he had a very intricate archery course that had twists and turns, small hills, and a 40ft bridge over a swamp that lead to a target at the end. Over the years, dad made many archery friends who would come over to shoot the course. Several of them had sons that would come to compete as well. During that period, no matter what new adventure or interest we had, it usually revolved around using our bows or shooting the course.

Later, our family moved to Nashville, Michigan to a farm house situated on 80 acres of land. It included rolling hills, about 10 acres of woods, a ravine with a small creek and 3 natural springs. What a great place for a new archery course! Not long after we moved, dad was back at his passion and soon began constructing a new archery course. It was a work in progress meaning he never stopped tinkering with it and he was always striving to make it bigger or better.

Our lives are shaped by many factors and the path we choose to follow is highly influenced by our environment, our upbringing and by various people that come into our lives. I often reflect on various people and the influences they had on me, but my dad has been the greatest influence in my life.