



Red Rock Mountain, Las Vegas
A Bright Evening Star
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One Thanksgiving, dad and mom were down from Las Vegas visiting. Dad's health was declining, although his mind was sharp as ever and his spirit was high.

I videoed dad and asked him questions such as which house we had lived in was his favorite, and what he thought about current politics.

I mentioned Samuel Johnson's April 7, 1775 pronouncement that "... patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel". I remarked that we do not know the context for how the remark arose, nor for sure what was on Johnson's mind at the time, but that history assured us Johnson was not indicting patriotism, only false patriotism.

Dad thought about that for a minute, then agreed that "false patriotism" is indeed the likely refuge of a scoundrel, but that true patriotism was like *a bright evening star*...in which love of country outshines all others.

Dad's insight stayed with me, through the years, as his health failed. He had called us four boys together to talk about what he wanted and how we were to help settle family matters when he passed. "I want you boys to take care of things, your mom can't even talk about it... and take care of mom for me." Within a short few weeks, dad was gone.

I realized dad's belief that patriotism was like a 'bright evening star in which love of country outshines all other stars', was a fundamental belief in which both dad and mom had raised us four boys. All four of us enlisted in the military upon graduating from high school, and served during the Vietnam War—two of us were in-country.

Dad, mom, my brothers and I, were pilots. I owned a Cherokee-140 once upon a time. I mention this because dad told us boys that it was his wish to be cremated, and scattered west of Las Vegas, over a pocket lake near *Red Rock*. Everyone knows that Las Vegas is a barren desert, but on the west side of the mountains, west of Las Vegas, forests abound with an inaccessible bounty of lush greens.

At dusk, my brother Larry and I carried dad's ashes and flew a light aircraft over Red Rock. And finally, we spotted the pocket lake dad had spoken of, like the pouch of a kangaroo hanging on the green mountain's side. At that moment, we knew this was the place to scatter his ashes. We banked the aircraft toward Las Vegas, and prepared to turn on the landing light so mom would know .

Mom sat on her porch with my brothers Ray and Jerry, looking west toward Red Rock. The sun had set and the night sky to the east was spotting with new stars brushing the twilight away. Mom awaited the moment, *the signal*, when dad would take wing with the stars.

The time arrived, and our plane banked gently into the blue-black of approaching dusk, with a backdrop of yester-light behind us and a sprinkling of twinkling stars before us. I opened the side window, held the precious container out into the wind stream ... *and dad soared away* ... and ever deeper into our hearts. At that moment we turned on the aircraft's brilliant landing lights. From mom's porch they could see Red Rock Mountain, and the new bright evening star that still outshines all others.

That warm August of 1994, Dad was at peace, knowing he had raised his boys to love god, country, and mom, and they would do as he had wished ... and honor him till our dying days.