

Arnold Nawrocki is dead

PLACE: A park bench in the Public Garden, Boston, Massachusetts

TIME: July, 2003

Roger and Donald, two elderly gentlemen, share a park bench. Donald is sipping a cup of coffee (in a Dunkin Donuts cup) while people-watching. Roger is intently reading a newspaper.

Listen to this. ROGER

What? DONALD

Listen to this. ROGER

What do you got there? DONALD

The paper. What does it look like? ROGER

It looks like the paper. DONALD

That's what it is. ROGER

But what part? DONALD

The obits I got here. ROGER

Oh, the Irish funnies. DONALD

Right. So listen to this. ROGER

I'm listening already. DONALD

Because I think you'll be interested. ROGER

DONALD

You'd be wrong.

ROGER

How do you know until you hear it?

DONALD

Because every day we do the same thing. We get breakfast at the Dunkin Donuts. I get a crueller and you get a muffin. We walk down here to the Public Garden and sit on this bench. I look at the pretty girls and you read that damn paper.

ROGER

What's wrong with wanting to be informed?

DONALD

Informed? You want to be informed?

ROGER

Yes. I see nothing wrong with wanting to know what's going on in the world.

DONALD

I never said there was.

ROGER

Yes you did.

DONALD

Ahh, please. I got Katie Couric to tell me what's going on in the world.

ROGER

You think she's going to tell you what's important?

DONALD

No, that's why I have you.

ROGER

You're impossible. I'm just trying to broaden your horizons.

DONALD

Fine. Broaden me.

ROGER

You ready?

DONALD

I'm ready already.

ROGER

All right. Here it is. Arnold Nawrocki is dead.

DONALD

No.

ROGER

Yes. Kidney failure it was.

DONALD

Oh.

ROGER

78.

DONALD

Wow. So Arnold Nawrocki is dead.

ROGER

Yes.

DONALD

My God.

ROGER

Yes.

DONALD

So tell me.

ROGER

What.

DONALD

Who was Arnold Nawrocki?

ROGER

Who's Arnold Nawrocki?

DONALD

That's what I asked.

ROGER

Your fancy Katie Couric didn't tell you who Arnold Nawrocki was?

Here's what it says, smart guy, right here in my Boston Globe. (*Reading*) Thanks to Arnold Nowrocki, millions of families and military men overseas could enjoy fresh cheese because the sealed dairy product could now last on the shelf up to six months.

DONALD

Imagine that.

ROGER

My thoughts exactly.

DONALD

Why they probably put him in the cheese hall of fame.

ROGER

You're making fun?

DONALD

Who's making fun? I'm just saying for such an invention he should be honored. Give him the Nobel Prize for cheese. Put a plaque with his name in some hall in Wisconsin.

ROGER

You really are an idiot.

DONALD

Or Vermont. Cheese is very big in Vermont, too.

ROGER

I'm trying to make a point.

DONALD

I should hope so. I should hope there's a reason we're sitting around here wasting a beautiful day talking about somebody who invented individually wrapped slices of cheese.

ROGER

He didn't invent them, he perfected them.

DONALD

Even more stupid that we're talking about him.

ROGER

A man achieves something, and you dismiss it, just like that.

DONALD

What achievement? Individually wrapped cheese slices?

ROGER

So your obit is going to be so impressive.

DONALD

Hey! I fought in a war, I ran a dry cleaning business on Charles Street – right there across the street I did – for forty years. Raised three kids and put them all through college. *(Pause)* They all came, you know. Senator John Kerry used to bring me his worsted tweeds. Governor Endicott Peabody would bring me his double-knits. Dukakis I never saw. I think he even ironed his own shirts.

ROGER

That's exactly my point.

DONALD

What is?

ROGER

Right there. What you just said.

DONALD

You know what I think? I think the cruellers are going right to your heart and clogging up your arteries.

ROGER

Listen to me.

DONALD

Keeping oxygen from getting to your brain is what they are.

ROGER

You were in business for forty years.

DONALD

Right there. On Charles Street. For forty years.

ROGER

And that they should put in your obit?

DONALD

Why not?

ROGER

Why not? Who cares is why not?

DONALD

Who cares? What that hell is that, who cares? Who are you to dismiss forty years of my life?

ROGER

That's exactly my point.

DONALD

Ahh, your point's on your head.

ROGER

Who cares is my point. You cleaned the suits of governors and senators. I sold insurance. Arnold Nawrocki invented cheese slices.

DONALD

I thought he perfected them.

ROGER

The point here is that your Katie Couric didn't tell you about Arnold Nawrocki. You had to read that in the paper.

DONALD

No, I had to have you read it to me.

ROGER

You said that. And you still don't get it.

DONALD

I get it, I get it.

ROGER

If Katie Couric doesn't say it on the TV, no one knows about it. Doesn't that bother you?

DONALD

That my coffee is cold from sitting here talking about Arnold Nawrocki, that's what's bothering me.

ROGER

Who is Katie Couric to decide who's life is important?

DONALD

Roger, how many thousands of people die every day? What is she supposed to do? Spend the whole Today show reading the obits?

ROGER

At least that would be fair.

DONALD

Fair, it might be. Boring, it certainly would.

ROGER

Why should it be that a man who invented –

Donald shoots him a look.

Alright, perfected cheese slices shouldn't be recognized out of all the others? Or why not the man who ran a dry cleaners for 40 years?

DONALD

Or the man who sold insurance?

The question cuts Roger to the quick. He fumes.

ROGER

It's just not fair.

After a pause...

DONALD

(Watching the women walk by him) Look, that one, I think she just winked at me.

Roger rolls his eyes and returns to his paper. Donald, who continues to people-watch, sits with a small smile of contentment, while Roger scowls as he reads his paper. The lights slowly fade.

END PLAY

Author's note

The following copy should be placed in the program:

Arnold Nawrocki, who passed away on June 30, 2003 from kidney failure, was, according the July 11, 2003 Boston Globe, " ...the man widely credited with bringing individually wrapped slices of cheese into the homes of millions of families... Mr. Nawrocki was not necessarily the first to wrap slices of cheese individually..." the article concluded, but the Globe, quoting Vincent Zehren, the author of a book titled "Process Cheese," wrote that "his was the first practical apparatus."