

# Bill Sergeant – He did what he was supposed to do

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on March 1, 2011)

I miss Bill Sergeant. I miss his phone calls telling me of topics he thought I should include in my *Historically Speaking* articles. I miss his kind manner, his easy way of telling me new information and his humble approach to significant accomplishments he personally had achieved. He knew the details because he had lived them!

Bill often told me of things he remembered, and his memory was sharp as a tack and ever accurate to the smallest details. These things he told me were the subjects of my columns. I delighted in his company and often sought him out to verify information I had been provided. More often than not he would confirm what I had been told, yet on occasion, he would quickly point out the error of the information I had been provided.

I never doubted him. He was always accurate in his memory and when others might speculate about things they only marginally understood, Bill would never take a position on a subject unless he had personal knowledge and experience with it. He was one of my favorite and frequent sources. I miss Bill Sergeant!

On Friday, 2/18/11, his family held a burial service, a celebration of life service and received friends. I was pleased to be able to be there to experience their goodbye to Bill. The military presence of the six gun salute, the honor guard, the presenting of the flag to the family, were all moving experiences and told of the family's pride in Bill's highly successful and eventful military career.

I thought of his story about "Happy Valley" South Korea where soldiers under his command who had been residents of Oak Ridge placed a wooden sign identifying their combat zone as "Happy Valley" in honor of the 15,000 person construction camp that was created to house the construction workers building the K-25 gaseous diffusion plant. What a tribute to the workers.

The Celebration of Life held for Bill in the Church of the Ascension, was also a fitting memorial. The readings, the prayers, the songs and the communion were all enhancements to the collective remembrance of the passing of a great man. Bill Sergeant had passed on. The service gave appropriate closure to a wonderful life of 91 years. Bill's was a life of tremendous successes and accomplishments while retaining a most humble manner.

The highlight of the service for me was the reading by David Sergeant, Bill's son, of a letter that Bill had penned to his family in October 2009. It spoke eloquently of Bill's pride in his family. Here is the letter in its entirety, thanks to David who shared it with me.

"'Legacy', By William T. Sergeant:

"I believe the most important thing I ever did, and for which my time on earth was helpful to others and to the world, was to raise four other human beings.

"Raising, not making them. 'Making' at best means contributing to the new human's looks, health, maybe wealth and intelligence, all of which, in total are nothing. Honesty, law abiding, love of country, acceptance of responsibility, love of family, unwillingness to ever shame parents, love of God, happiness that I am their father and proud of the respect from others of their parents, is 'Raising.'

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"My contribution to the eradication of a disease, my military service and my reasonably successful career, community and Rotary service are what I was supposed to do and could have been done just as well by thousands of others. They were only important to the extent they were the correct example for the four new people I raised.

"Proof of my success in raising four people will only be established by the seven people they raise.

"Judge me by these eleven.

Wow! What depth of understanding! What profound truth espoused in so few words! Bill, my hero, has written a masterpiece of family love and tradition. It makes me want to say, "Judge me by these seven," Fanny and I have two sons and five grandchildren. I know the pride Bill felt in family...I share that deep love and appreciation with him.

Yes, Bill was privileged to serve in Rotary International and got to lead for a number of years the effort to rid the world of the awful disease called polio. Yes, he was a tremendous leader of people who provided the security to protect our nation's most precious commodity, its highly enriched uranium. And, yes, he participated in the Manhattan Project and led troops into battle in the Korean War.

But, according to Bill, nothing he did compared to the raising of his children. What a tremendous legacy. Again, Bill has sought out the essence of the story and told it to us in plain English. That was Bill Sergeant, my friend.

Families today are all too often missing the "Bill Sergeant" style of leadership. Too many families today do not devote the needed time to their children. That is sad indeed. We should examine the features of Bill Sergeant's approach to "raising" his children with the thought being to improve our children's approach to child raising.

Each of us with families should pray that God will bless our families with the good sense to effectively raise children. Bill Sergeant's values that were so appropriately conveyed in his "Legacy" letter are values all parents should emulate.

Thank you Bill, still my friend - even if you are no longer with us in this life, I know you are here in spirit. The memory of your devoted life will help sustain us who knew you for years to come!

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Kathy Sergeant, Barbara Hood, Bill Sergeant, David Sergeant, and Patty Daughtrey shown standing in front of the statue of Bill honoring his work to eradicate Polio located in Krutch Park in Knoxville