

## Eulogy Sam Ballard

The family has made it very clear that we are gathered today to celebrate the life of Sam Hugh Ballard, Sr. Many friends Sam made through the years have told his family that he was one of the greatest men they ever knew. Certainly, not many men have had a life that was so wide-ranging or which exhibited such a wide range of talents.

He was born June 3, 1921 in Krum, Texas, the only son among four children. Two of his sisters passed away before Sam: Laura and Pokie. Wanda is still living and resides in Texas.

Sam graduated from Krum High School in 1940. He loved airplanes, and those of us who are older can understand the enchantment of those propeller-driven wonders. No surprise, then, that he enlisted in what was then the Army Air Corps. Luke Field, or Luke Air Force Base, was brand new at the time, and in 1941 that is where Sam was sent.

Later that year he attended a USO club event in nearby Glendale, an act that must have been God-guided, for that is when he met Flossie Anderson. They were married some months later, on August 7, 1942, a marriage that lasted until his death seventy years later.

As everyone knows, the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor only a few months before their marriage, and Sam served throughout World War II in the Pacific theater. He was an airplane maintenance technician and was part of both Air Offensive Japan and Air Offensive China. He saw action in the East Indies, New Guinea, the southern Philippines, and Luzon West Pacific. He was awarded the National Defense Service Medal, the American Defense Service Medal, the American Campaign Medal, the Victory Medal, and the Bronze Star. Flossie did not even know about some of these significant awards until his death. It is no surprise that he also received at least three Good Conduct Medals.

Sam continued in the Air Force after the war, and another phase of his service which few of us knew about pertained to the Berlin Air Lift. For those of you who are younger, this was a major crisis in American and Western history, so Sam's participation was of significance. The Soviets cut off the land-based supply route to West Berlin in an effort to take over that part of the city. The response of the United States was a massive airlift of supplies to Western Berlin. Before the Soviets gave in, there were fifty of these flights, and Sam was part of forty-nine of them.

But back to the 1940s. When baseball players signed up for service in World War II, leaving not enough behind to field teams, the U.S. decided to create a women's baseball league for morale. You know them through the movie, *A League of Their Own*. Flossie was invited to try out for the league, and those who know how well she could play knew she was a shoo-in, but Flossie was focused on her new husband and chose to remain in Phoenix to better keep up with war events.

Sam was still in the Air Force when Shirley and I began dating and I first met him. I also met Terry and Sam, Jr. then, who were not yet pre-teens. I quickly came to appreciate Sam for his friendliness. It did not take me long to recognize how supremely important Sam's family was to him. And he was immensely proud of Flossie's softball career. He followed the team even on road trips. He delighted in his two sons and took them on camping trips and participated with them in Boy Scouts.

Terry recalls with fondness one of the many trips they went on. He told me of one trip to Texas where he felt especially close to his dad. Another trip came while Sam was stationed in the

Philippines. He took the boys to a resort where they were allowed to climb all over an old Japanese tank. How cool was that for the boys?

I benefited personally from Sam's Philippines assignment. Most of you know he was an avid photographer. He took lots of pictures of his family, but he took other shots as well. There was a Catholic sect--I say "sect" because the Catholic Church was not pleased with what they did--who were called the Flagellantes. During Easter, the men among the Flagellantes marched while flaying their naked backs with whips which cut into their flesh. At the end of the march they were quite bloody, and at that time one of their number was literally crucified. The one chosen considered it to be a great honor.

Sam photographed the entire scene from beginning to end, and he did it so well that I was able to make it the lead story in a magazine I was editor of at the time. Sam brought the grill that still is on the deck at their home with the money the magazine paid him for the photos.

Before Sam retired, he rose to the rank of Master Sergeant. Then he went to work for the U.S. Post Office and became a mail deliverer. Shirley and I had long since moved from Phoenix to go to seminary to prepare for the ministry, so what I remember most about that time was that Sam drove Jezebel, his beloved pickup, on his rounds. As a minister, I am supposed to resist temptation, but I must confess to a certain covetousness about Jezebel. That was as neat a pickup truck that any man could have. Sam kept it immaculate, both mechanically and visually. The older it got, the more it became a work of art.

Flossie tells me that Sam painted some all the time they were married, but I was not aware of this talent or interest until much later. I do not recall whether he had retired yet from the post office, but I remember how he started painting in earnest. He would project a slide onto a canvas and duplicate the colors in the image. Over time, he became an exceptional painter and wood carver. My favorite artwork of his is the arcade at San Luis Obispo that hangs by the TV set in their den. The depth perception constantly amazes me. I suspect a number of you have Sam's paintings in your homes. Shirley has one in her study of a mysterious house on a hill Sam painted just from her description. Our daughter Paula has three, including one of a cat that was painted at the request of her son Josh, who was then just a boy. Sam loved doing these paintings for his family and, I suppose, for others who would sometimes give him a picture to work from.

Eventually the boys went on to college and started their careers. Sam Jr. had always been athletic and so his focus on basketball was no surprise to anyone. Terry's choice, though, to be a librarian was a bit odd to Sam. He came around, though, in good time and was as supportive and proud of Terry in his chosen profession as he was of Sam, Jr. But then Terry accepted a position in New York, which Sam thought was a big mistake. Didn't Horace Greely say, "Go West, young man, go West"? Before long, the wisdom of Terry's decision was clear and Sam and Terry agreed that for him at least the saying should be "Go East, young man, go East."

Terry and Sam knew their dad was proud of them. He told them so often enough. But perhaps they do not know how much he bragged about them to the rest of us. Sam genuinely was proud of his boys. He was also proud of his daughters-in-law. Terry married Donna Gael and they have one son, Robert Daniel, Bobby, who followed in his and his mother's footsteps into library work. Sam Jr. married the daughter of his coach in France, Brigitte Marie, and hauled her to the States to live in Phoenix. They have three children: Jordan James, Morgan Suzanne, and Derrick Tyler. Sam's pride in his grandchildren was unbridled.

Sam and Flossie were members of Eastside Baptist Church, and as a Baptist minister I don't want to minimize that. But Sam focused his time toward the Freemasons. He became a master mason in 1957 and in 1975 was master of Oriental Lodge #20. He served as its organist for more

than twenty years. Sam eventually attained the 33rd degree, which is the highest possible among Freemasons. He also served as past masters president for the El Zaribah Shrine. During all of these years of dedicated service, he ran the music for Scottish rites. I did not know Sam could play the organ, which is a difficult instrument. But I listened to him with pleasure when he played the guitar and sang country and western songs.

So today we celebrate Sam's extraordinary life. He was a military man who served his country, part of those whom Tom Brokaw called the Greatest Generation. He was an artist. He was a musician. He was a faithful friend. But I know that Sam wants most to be remembered for his love for Flossie, Terry, and Sam. In fact, the marriage of Flossie and Sam was a model for all of us to emulate. These two genuinely and deeply loved each other. And while we focus on Sam's love for Flossie, because he is the one whose life we are celebrating, I would be amiss if I did not acknowledge publicly Flossie's love for Sam.

During and after a cruise across the Atlantic, it was becoming apparent that Sam was being stricken with Alzheimer's Disease. That was in 2005. Flossie knew it before anyone else, of course. The disease progressed as it inevitably does and Flossie cared for him not just as a wife would be expected to, but as one who deeply loved her husband. She kept him at home longer than some of us thought she should, and she did so because her love for him did not wane even when his memory of her faded. When she put him into a care group, she selected well to make sure he received good treatment and respect. Flossie, your family salutes you. Your example of the best kind of marriage did not falter at the end.

How I wish all America, with its decreasing commitment to marriage, could see what marriage can be like as God meant it to be. You have been an example to us all.