

George Smyth December 13, 1930 – June 27, 2009

Council on Aging's 2006 "Volunteer Extraordinaire"

Our Man of Many Hats, A Personal Reflection by Tricia Homrighausen



I love this picture of my friend George. It was taken this past May at the Tustin Community Foundation Volunteer Recognition Luncheon. The day became sunny and warm, and Mighty Ducks hats were spontaneously provided by our gracious hosts. George playfully put his on. Looking through my camera lens at him, his smile so big, his eyes so merry, I thought to myself, "Wow! This guy really looks great in a hat!" I wonder now if this came from the fact that George Smyth wore so many different hats, and in an amazing way he wore each of them so well.

George wore his **Navy Hat** proudly serving our country as a pilot aboard air craft carriers in the later years of the Korean War. After four years of active duty in the early 1950's, he went on to serve several more years in the Naval Reserve.

A graduate from the University of Maryland (BS Biology) and Drexel University (MBA), George wore his **Career Hat** as he would say, in "sales and marketing". This vague reference to "sales and marketing" actually meant 12 years as the Vice-President of Marketing for Edwards Laboratory in Costa Mesa.

Next came over 17 years as President and CEO of Interpore International in Irvine. George headed a major 7 million dollar division of this international biomaterials company. He then went on to serve as a consultant for Nobel BioCare until his retirement at the age of 74. "Sales and marketing" indeed -- the **Humility Hat** was one my friend never took off.

In 2004, ready and willing to give more, George came to the Council on Aging. For the past 5 years he shared with us his many gifts as he wore his **Volunteer Hat**. On George's volunteer application he indicated he wanted to "brighten the lives of a few people". In his work as a Friendly Visitor, an Ombudsman, in Development, and with our SmileMakers Guild, George brightened the lives of a few thousand people. George was passionate about his work here, and even through serious illness, he continued to give all that he could to the Council and his clients. George and his wife, Laura, also gave their generous financial support to the work we do.

In the words of Cheryl Meronk, Council on Aging's CEO, "George was one of those rare people who give of themselves simply because they need to. He worked tirelessly to make things better for the Council on Aging and those we serve, and never asked for anything in return but the promise that we would consider his ideas. He was an inspiration to us all."

Knowing George, I believe what he would want remembered is not what he did for someone, but rather what someone did for him. His Friendly

Visitor relationship with a lonely and isolated senior woman named "Peter" would change George forever. In Laura's words, George was "crazy about Peter", and their friendship "got into George's gut". With Peter, George developed a close bond that he had previously only experienced with his family. Different from his years of professional relationships, Peter was able to open up a part of George that had never been opened before.

The **Friend and Mentor Hat** was the hat I was privileged to have George wear with me. The careful listener, the plain speaking advisor, the writing companion — whatever I needed, George was there. In our last few months of working together, George patiently tried to teach me some of the roles he had assumed here at the Council. I had no idea how much I would miss him--how much we would all miss him--when the day came that his mentoring and volunteering ended.

I have saved for last the hat that by far meant the most to George. This was his **Family Hat**. Engaged after only two months of dating, George's wife of 52 years knew that George was "the one". In more recent years, as they both struggled through serious illnesses, George assumed more and more responsibilities around their home. I know Laura became even more convinced that she had picked "the right one".

George and Laura raised five children -- Glenn, Kelly, Lois, Scott, and Jay. Their lives have also known the joy of their children's spouses and 7 grandchildren. With his grandchildren George wore his **Pop-Pop Hat**. I can only imagine how wonderful he looked in that one.

It seems so fitting that George's family gathered in the backyard of their Tustin home on the 4th of July to remember him. His family, fireworks, and a full moon -- I don't think George would have wanted it any other way.

George, we all miss you so. Perhaps there is some comfort in our knowing that whatever hat you are now wearing, we know you wear it so well

(Tricia is the Coordinator of Volunteers for the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program at the Council on Aging.)