



Robert "Bob" Bytwerk

August 13, 1926 - October 1, 2019

Robert Lewis Bytwerk ("Bob" to all) was born on August 13, 1926 and died peacefully on October 1, 2019. He was the third of four sons born to Peter and Ida Bytwerk in Muskegon. By the time he attended Muskegon Christian School the Depression was everywhere felt. He remembered that his mother found a pair of used girl's shoes that fit him, which he adamantly refused to wear to school. He and his brothers worked in the family grocery store as it slowly went broke. The four Bytwerk brothers were very close and made for a lively household which he fondly recalled.

He graduated from Muskegon High School in 1944 and soon was in the Army Air Corps, joining the army of occupation in Germany in 1946. By his own admission he was not a model soldier ("biggest goof-off in the army," according to one angry superior officer, who phrased it more bluntly than that), but his background in the family grocery store and the ability to type got him the assignment of managing the base PX in Erlangen. He flourished, even considering staying in Germany after his army service was completed. He later regretted that he had missed the opportunity to sit in on the Nuremberg Trials of the major Nazi war criminals, since riding around southern Germany on a motorcycle he bought with a friend was more attractive to a 20-year-old.

He returned home and, supported by the G.I. Bill, attended Calvin College. He studied hard and graduated in 1950 with a degree in teaching. Along the way he found his wife, Ruth Stromback and by graduation had their first son, Randall. Their second son Daniel was born a year after.

The post-war years boomed, but it took time to find his place. He took his wife and son back to Muskegon to a rundown house owned by his parents and looked for what to do. He had an office job with Continental in Muskegon, where time passed slowly. After a month he met with his boss and both agreed it best for him to seek other employment. He went door-to-door selling cemetery lots, baby furniture, and landscaping.

He recalled one of the few times his father was angry with him during that period. A

relative who had a double route delivering Eckrich meat took a new job. Peter Bytwerk was confident his son could take over that job. Bob wasn't interested. "I don't care what you think," his father said. "You have a family to support." Bob replied: "I don't know what I want to do, but I know that it isn't delivering meat."

He found a job with Ehinger's Shoe Store in Grand Rapids, where his boss introduced him to the advertising manager at the Grand Rapids Herald who needed a salesman. He took the job. It suited him.

Meanwhile, his son Daniel contracted cancer. Despite treatment at Mayo Clinic, Daniel died in 1956, a year after daughter Beth was born, followed Jeanne in 1962.

His sales job took him to Robert Sneden, then president of Davenport Institute, who became his mentor. First, Sneden asked him to teach morning classes at Davenport. Later, Sneden told him Davenport owned the local franchise of Manpower, a temporary help service, that wasn't going anywhere. Would he like to buy it? "I have no money," he said. "We can work that out," said Sneden. To build equity in his new business and pay medical debts, he taught courses at Davenport in the morning, went to Manpower during the day, drove home to take a nap, then taught evening Dale Carnegie courses throughout Western Michigan. Manpower flourished over time, and he took on a former student at Davenport, Dave Clonan, as co-owner. Through it all, as in all of his life, he rarely complained, he approached all he did with enthusiasm, and remarkable good humor.

In his fifties with Clonan as a trusted partner and Manpower succeeding beyond the dreams of a boy who grew up during the Depression, he gradually reduced his time at the office, enjoying travel, boating, downhill skiing, and buying lakefront homes. He was challenged by his wife Ruth's slow descent into the mists of Alzheimer's. She died in 1999.

He spent the next 20 years enjoying his family, the company of good friends, travel, woodworking, his dogs Shannon and Buddy, Lake Michigan, and Charlevoix. He read widely and had well-founded opinions. He gave generously in many directions, commenting that what his mother had told him was true: "You will never become poor by giving." He died as he wished, cared for by his children and Hospice, in his own bed looking over Lake Michigan.

He is survived by Randall and Sharon (Van Haitsma) Bytwerk, Beth Byrne, Jeanne and Grant Vander Veer, along with grandchildren David Paul Bytwerk and his wife Victoria

(Moffatt), Aaron and Heather Byrne, Sophia and Gavin Vander Veer, and great-grandchild Jalen Cuevas. He mourned the loss of his parents, his wife Ruth, his son Daniel, his brothers John, Edward, and Clarence, his granddaughter Katharine Bytwerk, and many friends.

A visitation will be held 6-8 PM Thursday, October 3, 2019 at The VanZantwick Chapel of Sytsema Funeral & Cremation Services, 620 Washington Ave, Grand Haven, MI 49417.

There will be a memorial gathering at Seven Steps in Spring Lake 6-9 PM Tuesday, October 8, 2019. Details available at: <https://www.bytwerk.com/bob/>. If you plan to attend, kindly inform Randy Bytwerk (bytw@calvin.edu). Those who wish may make to a memorial contribution to the Kate Bytwerk Scholarship Fund at Calvin College, the Alzheimer's Association of Michigan, or Gracious Grounds (Grand Haven). Please sign the family's online guestbook at www.sytsemafz.com.

Events

OCT **Visitation** 06:00PM - 08:00PM

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The VanZantwick Chapel

620 Washington, Grand Haven, MI, US, 49417

OCT **Memorial Gathering** 06:00PM - 09:00PM

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Seven Steps Up

116 S. Jackson Street, Spring Lake, MI, US, 49456

Comments



“ Bob Bytwerk was my longest and best friend in the world. We were about the same age and news of his death hit me hard. How could it be that I would still be alive and this so beloved, admired and respected man be gone? It seemed so wrong. When I came to Grand Rapids, MI in 1953 to work at the television station I was also raising my growing family. Bob was raising his. We became fast friends as we began our careers, discovering we shared significant life passions, and lunched together weekly for decades sharing about our lives. When I moved to California in '77, we continued in to be in contact, and as friends. Bob was everything I admired in a man. He will live forever in my memory as one of the high points of my life. My heart goes out to his beloved children, his remarkable family and friends. As much as we miss him, we can feel gratitude for the fact that we knew him, and had him in our lives for as long as we did.

Bruce Radder Sr. - October 16, 2019 at 10:26 AM



“ Bob Bytwerk, my dear friend Jeanne's dad, has left this old earth for his next adventure. To Jeanne, Beth, Randy, spouses & all the children, grandchildren & great grandchild - I ask that God will carry you through & help you grieve such a loss, that you will tangibly feel his arms holding you & comforting you all.

He was a bigger than life character, always jovial & very generous, never seemed to be without something constructive to do, always tinkering with something - at least that is the way it appeared to me as a teenager. The guy was always positive - and it seemed that his power of positive thinking could change circumstances. There would be dark clouds looming in the sky, it didn't matter what the weather report said. "It's going to be a beautiful day, today!" Bob would proclaim, as he continued packing up the car for a planned outing of some sort. Jeanne was used to this - and would joke about it. ;) It made a lasting impression on me. I was new to positive thinking & proclamations. And, sure enough, the weather would clear up & it would end up being a beautiful day, against all predictions. He was a man of faith & knew the power of his words, and consciously - chose to believe and speak positive. "The power of life & death is in the tongue"

I feel blessed to have crossed paths with him & his family, a wonderful man, dad, grandpa. Farewell & God bless you, Robert Bytwerk.

Love, Maureen.

maureen o'brien - October 06, 2019 at 04:39 PM



“

oh my, oh my

My first and foremost memory, is on the boat with Bob on Lake Michigan. I can vividly see him leaning back, hands behind his head, saying the only title I ever wanted is Captain of my boat, as he smiled on the beautiful boat (about 1982) proudly and happily.

He then imparted, longer the title, less of a job....

Dinner with sweet and charming Ruth & Bob in Grand Rapids; the Tree House, Charlevoix. A man so giving and hospital from his favorite places. So desperately proud and loving of his beautiful family. He worked hard, sharp clear perspective and coveted and appreciated dearly his life and family. Such a wonderful example of living life.

A very dear friend to my parents he was. I grew up knowing only that my family loved dearly Bytwerks, starting firstly with Pete & Ida generously renting the coveted little apartment upstairs, post World War II to my parents. Followed my decades, including today, of appreciation. Love to the Bytwerks from the Bacharachs, Alan

Alon Bacharach - October 03, 2019 at 11:10 PM



“

Dearest Jeanne, Grant, and family,

Sending love and tenderness.

So sorry for your loss.

Bob made the world a better, kinder place.

Wish I was there to sing for him in person.

Karen and I are getting together this evening to share memories of Bob.

Love always,

Jenise

Jenise Brown - October 03, 2019 at 03:43 PM



“

Condolences to you Grant, your wife and your family. I crossed paths with him for several years, some of those times he was with your dad. A very interesting guy!

Doug & Nancy Ditmar

Doug Ditmar - October 03, 2019 at 02:07 PM



“

Jeanne and family,

So very sorry for your loss. May peace be with you.

Robin Ackley-Chase

ROBIN CHASE - October 03, 2019 at 08:26 AM



“ Uncle Bob to me via my wife Jan Bytwerk. His love of life and genuine interest in all he met impressed me so. While working long hours on his Charlevoix home over the last year he would be quick to remind us that were able to put in such long days solely due to the example of hard work we learned from him and his brother John. His sense of humor and positive outlook were amazing. I will miss him so much but am so thankful to have been a part of his life.

Laurens TenKate - October 02, 2019 at 01:27 PM



“ Dear Jeanne, Beth and Randy,

We are sorry for the loss of your dad. We will remember your father as a warm familyman. He was very generous. Wishing you strenght during this hard time.

Ben and Gerda bij 't Werk
The Netherlands

Ben bij 't Werk - October 02, 2019 at 01:19 PM



“ Dear Randy, Beth, and Jeanne,

I am so very sorry for the loss of your wonderful dad.

I was and always will be so very grateful for all the amazing Michigan family vacations that he took me on with Beth. I will always cherish those memories and special places (especially Charlevoix).

Also, of course will forever laugh at all the shenanigans he pulled on Barber Terrace.

Candy Marz (Ganzevoort)

Candy Marz - October 02, 2019 at 11:32 AM



“ I first met Bob when I attended Davenport College in 1961. He was one of my teachers. After graduation, he offered me a job at Manpower. During that time he introduced to my wife of 56 years, Mary Jo Hermans In 1963 I left to go to the Army. In 1977 he offered me a chance to buy into the business. We were partners and friends for 30 years. It was a big success and I'm grateful for the opportunity. Rest In

Peace

David Clonan - October 02, 2019 at 11:19 AM



“ The last of the four Bytwerk boys, Pete & Ida's kids, from 492 Oak Street Muskegon. His was a life well lived and we can all take lessons from uncle Bob.

Bruce Bytwerk - October 02, 2019 at 10:30 AM



“ "One ski Bob", as dubbed many years ago as he would go around the lake on one ski behind the speed boat. Thank you for being a major part of my life by taking me under your wing, and helped me with important decisions, I am a better person because of you.

Jamie Clark - October 02, 2019 at 10:06 AM



“ Bob Bytwerk “uncle Bob “ was the man in this world I would most like to be like. These were some of the strengths I observed.

1. looks for the best in people
- 2 kind
- 3 generous
- Appreciative
4. Humble in many cases.
5. Cared about others
- 6 trusting
- 7 expects the best out of others
8. Makes the best of what ever happens
9. Realist
10. A welcoming smile when he greets others.
11. Appreciated his Dutch heritage.
- 12 Could find joy in the little things in life.
- 13 wisdom with the world .
- 14 Interested in others and
- Loved his family and extended family
- 15 cared deeply for friends and there family

I will tell stories of him for the rest of my life. David Medendorp

David Medendorp - October 02, 2019 at 09:15 AM



“ Uncle Bob was a force to be reckoned with, a perpetually upbeat 110% guy. He’s been my go to guy since my dad died, always ready with thoughtful advice and a cheerful word. He will be missed.

Barbara Bytwerk - October 02, 2019 at 07:25 AM



“ We loved Uncle Bob, and know he loved us in return. Summer time was fun time on Lake Michigan with the Bytwerks. (My mom was Aunt Ruth's sister.) When my sister, Leslie, Jeanne and I were youngsters, Uncle Bob would come into our room at night 'sleep walking' and crash down across our bed. Oh, the shrieks and laughter! He was full of fun and adventure and we will miss him so much. Our son, Silas, and I had the good fortune of having a great visit this past summer with Jeanne, Grant, Gavin, and Uncle Bob in Charlevoix. Don't get too close to the sun on Icarus, Uncle Bob! We will see you again some day. -Kim (Conn) Dunn



Kim Dunn - October 02, 2019 at 07:02 AM