

Eulogy for C. Ray Stokes

By Jim Froelich, DO, TCOM Class of 1981

May 15, 2007

What can you say about a giant? I interviewed Ray and Edna a year ago, and I have brought you some of his words today. But what words can even start to describe this man, this giant, this icon? So I am going to start where Ray started in our interview...

YOUNG RAY

Ray was never a paperboy. After Amon Carter hired him for his first job at the Fort Worth Star-Telegram in the early '40s, he told him, **"I don't employ any 'paperboys,' I only have paper carrier/salesmen."** Mr. Carter implied that Ray was to act with greater dignity and class than a mere paperboy. He was always to be more and always be the best that he could be. **"So you see I was never a paperboy"**... and he always tried to live up to those higher expectations placed on him by Amon Carter for the rest of his life.

At first Ray was the route "carrier/salesman" for just a small part of downtown Fort Worth. He rapidly worked himself up to the **District Manager of Paper Distribution** for the Star Telegram. **"Oh it was a great job. I had the Blackstone Hotel, the Worth, the Westbrook and the Texan, all of the finest hotels in Fort Worth. I had people delivering papers in all of them. They would deliver and I would get paid. Then I would give them their percentage and keep the rest. Oh that was a sweet job!"**

World War II changed things. Ray had a great job but the war drew him in and he joined the marines. **"When the officials saw that I had experience with the newspaper, they asked me if I would like to be in P.R. I said 'sure' so they made me a war correspondent."** He was 30 years old and all the others men in his platoon were 17 to 19 years old. **"They didn't just call me 'Pop'; they called me 'Grandpa'."** First it was off to Miramar for training, then out to Hawaii on Sept. 9, 1945, then on to Okinawa. **"The only thing,"** he said, **"was that the war was over on September 1! I've always told people that I wasn't a 'combat reporter'... I was a 'combatless reporter'."**

THE COUPLE

And what about the couple? You can't hardly say just "Ray"; you almost have to follow Ray with "and Edna." "Ray & Edna," "Ray & Edna." You rarely found one without the other. They have been quite a team.

People were always asking Ray how they stayed together all those years. He would tell them that they got married Christmas night 1934, right in the middle of the Great Depression. So Ray would tell people, **"We were married in a deep**

depression, both of us got married in a deep depression.” Then he would follow with, **“In those days it cost \$35 to get a divorce, and we simply didn’t have it, so we just stayed married. It was way cheaper.”**

Ray and Edna were never blessed with children. They did have family with Edna’s and Ray’s sisters and their nieces and nephews, etc., but they never had any of their own. So they made a habit of adopting young friends along life’s trail as their surrogate children. Just like Ray’s combatless reporting, they did some truly excellent childless parenting to many.

TCOM

Ray had several jobs for the 20 years following his military service. But in April of 1969 he applied for a job at the Texas Osteopathic Medical Association (TOMA) where he was “slightly acquainted” with Tex Roberts, the executive director of TOMA. As he applied at TOMA, he was not initially aware of an opening at a fledgling medical school, the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine (TCOM). But a few days later, there he was, standing in front of Drs. George Luibel, D.D. Beyers and Carl Everett. **“I must have done OK on the interviews because I got the job.”**

Ray’s initial duties as the college’s first employee was finding competent and hard working office staff... so he hired the First Lady of TCOM, his wife, Edna. Then he and she literally began to lay the foundation of the institution on a daily basis. Ray was the **TCOM director of development** from 1969 to 1980. He sought and hired the first dean, Dr. Henry Hardt. He hired the first professor, Dr. Libby Harris. He and Edna raised like their own children, first the TCOM Class of '74, then the class of '75 and '76. He and Edna adopted those classes like they were their own children. In a very real sense, the people in those classes became their children.

Ray then continued with the school after his first retirement (in 1980) as the curator for special collections and college historian, and there he stayed until 1990. Some of you remember Ray from the '70s and the '80s, traveling the state speaking to D.O.s everywhere, selling the college. He would go **anywhere** to raise the money necessary for the new school to succeed. He went to every one of the TOMA district meetings that he could get an invitation to, and some that he could not get an invitation to. Ray twisted arms and egos, until enough money was raised to get TCOM on its way.

Early on, three buildings were acquired on Camp Bowie: a bar and an apartment complex (well known for its use by several of the local “ladies of the night”) and the old Taverner’s Bowling Alley. Ray would cut right through the alley way behind the buildings and over to the bowling alley while it was being remodeled... but not Dean Hardt. **“He wouldn’t walk down that alley. He would walk all the way up the block and around the buildings on the Camp Bowie side even**

though that was way out of the way.” He was NOT going down that alley. Ray told me, **“A lot of people called that apartment complex a warehouse because of what was going on there.”** When Ray asked Dean Hardt why he wouldn’t cut through, the dean responded that he was afraid that a church member might spot him behind that warehouse, and what would they think! Ray said, **“that didn’t bother me one bit... I taught Sunday school.”** And so he did, for 51 years.

One of Ray’s favorite stories about the early days at TCOM was about when he got a late night call because the TCOM part of Fort Worth was flooding, and water was getting into the anatomy lab. Well, Ray had to move all four of the cadavers somewhere before they floated off, so he loaded them onto some sort of pallet one at a time and moved them up into Dean Hardt’s office. He had to move them up a ramp and several steps, then up to Dr. Hardt’s office. And he had to do it all by himself in the middle of the night. But he got it done. When he got home at about four or five in the morning and was headed for bed, he suddenly realized that he should call Dean Hardt and warn him of what to expect when he got to his office that morning. **“Can you imagine if we hadn’t thought to call him?”**

Even in his 70s Ray still was not ready to slow down. He started collecting oral histories of Texas D.O.s for the collage. He told me, **“Craig Elam was my boss, I answered to him. He was really helpful. Most of the interviews were done right at the doctor’s offices. I usually went to them.”** Even in his 70s, Ray continued to work hard chasing D.O.s all over the state, but this time with a recorder and questions about the early days asking for interviews instead of checks.

He was 70 years old... He never stopped. And that was 25 years ago when I met him... **You all remember him then! You know, the man in the white hat? MR. SUSTAINER [of the Texas Osteopathic Medical Association].**

Do you remember how he would call your name across the room... that long, tall, slender fella with that unique, deep, booming voice and a big, always-present smile. You remember how he always seemed to know everyone’s name... but especially yours. And how he would give you that big two-handed handshake with that twinkle in his eyes that let you know that you were special to him. Then he’d ask about your wife and family and your practice and your home town.

Tommy Hawkes reminded me today of how, a minute or two after the greetings were over, he’d look you in the eye and say, “Gosh it’s good to see you!” He created a *thrill* for you every time you walked into the room, year after year at every TOMA convention. **You**, too, could be a TOMA sustainer... be one of the good guys... Ray would even give you a white hat. All you had to do is write that check to TOMA! How many of you still have those white hats? He meant so

much to TOMA and to TCOM. Ray was the common thread that held us so closely together back when we were one.

About 20 years ago, Ray and Edna told me that I was going to be one of their pallbearers. I thought they were kidding. About 10 years ago, I realized that they weren't kidding. So by way of explanation, one day Ray told me that he and Edna had talked about it and that all of their friends were dying off. So they decided that they would pick a bunch of young doctors so they wouldn't have to worry about outliving their pallbearers. Ray told me the very same story Saturday a week ago. I guess I'm glad we didn't let him down.

Dean Hahn dropped by to see Ray last week and told him that he was, and will always be "TCOM's number one employee" ...and that he is.

Ray officially retired from TCOM in 1990. He was nearly 79 years old. Of course then he went back and did volunteer work at the hospital, and I'm not sure that he ever quit coming to the TOMA conventions to help out and to pin those white hat stickers on the "good guys."

I have no doubt that Ray is right here with us now. And if he could, he would stand here tall and teach us like his Sunday school class. What were the lessons that he would teach us from such a rich and full life?

Work hard. Give 100% and then **give more**.

Be happy. Smile all the time.

Be genuinely interested in everyone you meet and always be ready to help them.

Love often. Love your church, love your friends, love your TCOM family and the osteopathic profession. He would ask us to love Edna because she is going to need us more now that he is gone. Love life and all its incredible abundance.

And he would tell us, "Never quit giving of yourself, and NEVER, EVER, ever slow down."

God bless you, Ray. You certainly blessed us.