

A Tribute to Paul Stam, Sr.

This tribute is a free-form exposition of the character of the man described in the 31st chapter of Job. Read it and decide whether I have faithfully applied the text.



I should first provide brief introductions to my grandfathers.

I did not know my mother's father, Carl Levring. When my mother was a baby her father died from malaria previously contracted in the Army Medical Air Corps during World War I. The only picture I have of him is taken with his soccer team in Copenhagen, Denmark. You can pick him out in the picture by his uncanny resemblance to his great-granddaughter, Jana. He was a chemist by profession.



I knew my father's father, Jacob, well before he died, having lived with him for a while and then near him in New Jersey for several years. His family motto was "Ebenezer," which Jacob interpreted as "Hitherto hath the Lord done it all." I remember he led in prayer and Bible readings after almost every meal. He signed many of his letters "Israel" because he had been born again and knew the meaning of his name.

He was a kind man. I remember driving with him down a busy street. He stopped his car and all other traffic to assist an elderly lady cross the street. One holiday, when I was living with him, he took his family to provide Thanksgiving to a local rest home.

He was not proud. After his death in 1973 I learned that he had been president of Gideons International and attorney for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and helped grow several international mission organizations. He hadn't thought to mention it to me when I was living with him.



He and his wife, Deana, had 7 children. Three are missionaries, three are University professors; but his oldest son, my father, Paul, was neither. By profession he was first a textile chemist and then, in a second career, a lawyer.

He met my mother, Jane, at Wheaton College during the war. During his senior year he worked on the Manhattan Project. After graduation he entered the Navy as a radar officer. A Kamikaze attack on his destroyer resulted in his being awarded the Purple Heart at Okinawa. My parents' wedding was a prototypical "hippie" event, held at the end of a summer camp under a tin roof, with my mother's campers as attendants at the wedding.

(As a child here's what I remember of my father.) He was pretty strict, and even used the paddle occasionally, but I never recall any punishment in anger or that he was ever unjust. I thoroughly deserved what I got.

He was a constant reader. Almost every wall of his home was covered with thousands of books, but his favorite book was the Bible. He memorized whole chapters while commuting to work. He would inspire us to learn as well, by making it a competition or a contest. As a research scientist, he believed that all truth was God's and that Christians had nothing to fear from true science. He was a Fellow of the American Scientific Affiliation, which then consisted of Christian teachers and research scientists in the physical sciences.

For a few years he commuted from North Carolina to New York. I never felt he was gone that much because he and my mom had the same rules and when he was home we went everywhere with him. One day, while I was a teenager, our whole family was startled by my father's behavior.

We lived on a lake with a swimming raft in the middle. My father said, "Last one to the raft is a stinkweed." That was the worst word I ever heard him say. He was funny-knew lots of jokes-but I never heard one that was even slightly lewd or off-color.



My father knew Dottie, my wife, before I did. He seemed to be shocked when we were engaged. Dottie will testify that he treated his three daughters-in-law as if they were his own. They were truly a part of his family. He was an honorary Girl Scout-as the troop treasurer. And for you ladies, he did something else. He led the research that gave you stretch cotton panties and wrinkle-shed fabric (no-iron). Tell your daughters about this. It was not always so.

He was a true environmentalist. I do not mean that he was like the gassy greens. He was a research chemist who knew the science. For a time he was North Carolina's enforcer of soil pollution laws. At another point, he led the effort to find safe storage for nuclear wastes.

My father did not participate in or tolerate any kind of racial prejudice. His work and missionary interest brought him into contact with people from all over the world. Our home enjoyed a dizzying succession of guests from around the world. On my 12th birthday, I recall that he had Norbu, the brother of the Dalai Lama of Tibet at our home for a visit, with my father's cousin Ruth, who had been a missionary to Tibetan refugees in India.

His special interest was the Chinese people. He and my mom befriended dozens of Chinese students at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill who needed to learn English and the gospel. Right after the incident at Tiananmen, when he was 65 years old, he participated in a public protest, complete with a picket sign.



He was evangelistic. Recently, I was discarding some old business records and came across some notes. As a telephone counselor for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association he had encouraged several people to find faith in Christ that week.

He was kind. At one point, he was head of research and development for Burlington Industries. After his death several of his employees and secretaries told me how kind and thoughtful he was to the support staff and that they loved him. I never saw my father or grandfather ever give a waitress at a restaurant anything but courtesy. If a waitress made a mistake on an order he would eat it as served. He explained to me that he had been taught to eat what was put before him. He wasn't going to ruin the day of someone making minimum wage so he could be picky.

My father believed in personal charity. One of my mother's aunts was truly crazy. One of her abiding prejudices was against men in general and the husbands of her relatives in particular. In her 80's, she thought she had broken her leg. She finally let my parents take her into their home for a while. My father would have to carry her daily up and down the stairs. She would complain, "Jane, don't let Paul throw me down the stairs."

My father did have a stubborn streak. Shortly before his college graduation he wrote a public letter protesting college attendance policy. A faculty committee decreed that my father would not graduate from Wheaton College unless he apologized. This was in wartime and the consequences to my father were serious. Without his degree he would go as an army private instead of being commissioned as a naval officer. But he wouldn't easily apologize since he felt he was right. He was to graduate with high honors and many members of the senior class vowed not to participate in graduation without him. Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed-an appropriately innocuous apology was worked out-the college cheered him when he received his diploma. My father learned that there might be an advantage in letting those protest letters sit a day or two.

He had integrity. As an attorney, he had a major client with a major tax problem that could only be solved by some creative backdating of documents. He wouldn't go along with it. That caused him major problems.



In the last several years of his life, he suffered from depression due to a chemical imbalance in the blood. He endured with pretty good grace the well meaning amateur theologians who tried to help him find the unconfessed sin that was causing his problem. He was a sinner, like all of us, but he had actually read the Book and knew his Redeemer.

In the last year of his life I was in the North Carolina House of Representatives. I think he had as much fun with that experience as I did. When environmental bills were being debated he would sit in the gallery and advise me on amendments by turning his thumb up or down. I would then spread the

word to 5-10 representatives around me. The lobbyists couldn't figure how we were getting our information.

In 1990, my father died suddenly of an aneurysm. There was sadness, of course, but also the recognition that he had found and followed God's will right to the end and was blessed.

The weekend before he died, my daughter, Jana and I spent time with him at Camp Caraway doing things he loved-singing, Bible study, a legal seminar and a competitive game of volley ball. He was 6'4" and was great to have at the net in volleyball or tennis. At 65, he would even play low post in basketball, if needed to make even teams, but he played like Oostertag [I think that means he never left the ground].

He is buried at Arlington but the memorial service was at Chapel Hill Bible Church. He loved to sing bass in the choir enthusiastically. Most of his life he taught Bible in his church as well as often to youth or college classes.

Job concludes in verse 35 of chapter 31, "I sign now my defense-let the Almighty answer me." And the Almighty does answer-Well done, good and faithful servant-enter into the joy of your Lord.