

Reflections on our dear Uncle B
By Jennifer Roney Gwyn
August 2010

I've always been fascinated by my Uncle B, so has my Daddy and my sister, Carrie. When you read his obituary, you, too must be impressed by the accomplishments in his life. As a life-long learner, educator, patron of the arts, and servant of Christ, it's easy to admire him. He was humble, and until recent years, I never really knew what an impact he's made in this world. But, I've always known his impact on us – because to his family, we always knew that we were what mattered most to him.

My fascination with him started as a child as we all anxiously anticipated his visits to the farm from New York City each summer and each Christmas. I remember Daddy telling the same stories about his years as a child on the farm. . .Uncle B coming to visit was an event! And, he always came bearing unique and personal gifts from the city, usually a special Sunday dress for Carrie and me. . .and not very many little girls in Alamance County, North Carolina had dresses from New York City! We would gather as family frequently when he visited to spend time together, to listen to his stories and to just be around him. There was something about him that drew us to him.

He loved the city and his little apartment on East 49th street. He shared that tiny apartment with us on a family visit – and gave us a complete insider's tour, avoiding the typical tourist spots. Now, when I visit New York, I'm drawn to those places. I can sense his presence there. The city was so much a part of him, even after he left, that when you go there it's like visiting him. I'm drawn to the place and it just feels a little like home – all because that's where he spent so many years of his life.

My fascination has something to do with his generous spirit; his fierce sense of independence, his appreciation for others and his ability to quietly encourage us on the paths life was taking us. As an aspiring writer, Uncle B encouraged me by being my New York pen pal. I think I was as young as 6 or 7 when we started writing and for the next 7 years, we wrote each other several times a month, forming a special connection. I have hundreds of postcards with his witty prose, jokes and his unique handwriting that I cherish to this day. If you wrote Uncle B, he always wrote back. One of my most vivid memories during those years was getting dressed up one summer afternoon and going with my Granddaddy to the airport to pick up Uncle B for one of his summertime visits.

His passion for education, history and the arts didn't end when he retired and moved back to the farm. He shared his love of the arts with us, taking us to the ballet, plays or the symphony, generating an appreciation for the arts. He's always encouraged our educational pursuits, most recently stocking our children's libraries with dictionaries and atlases, early reader books and anything to encourage a love of learning. Some of our most recent Sunday dinner conversations were about the

teaching methods used in Lee's kindergarten classroom and in Emily's and Matthew's classes at school.

He loved animals, too, owning several dogs since his retirement on the farm— Dolly, Rusty and Austie, whom he left behind. He was visiting one summer when I got my first black lab puppy and together, we named her Black Beauty.

But, more than anything, he taught us through his example how to care and love each other. From never missing a birthday or a chance to send a holiday card (and I mean every holiday), we always knew he was thinking of us and available to us. From taking care of others through his visits, cards, notes, bags of groceries. . .caring in his own way for Granddaddy, Aunt Edith, Grandmother and Aunt Nancy as they went through times of illness and death. It was just two weeks ago, that he disappeared for a few hours, spending an afternoon visiting friends in the community. His favorite blessing to recite at family dinners was an Episcopalian blessing that ended with, "Always make us mindful of the needs of others."

Later in life, it was the quiet moments with Uncle B that I always cherished. I saw him nearly every time I came home. He's been at every family gathering, every holiday and so much part of our family life that's it's going to be so different without him. He loved watching our children enjoy Christmas and love sharing memories of his Christmases as a child around the breakfast table.

But, most of all in these last few years, he encouraged me through his love and appreciation for my mother and father. Through his quiet and gentle nature, he was a mentor and a guide to all of us, but especially to my Daddy. Uncle B will be deeply missed, but he lives on in our hearts and the example he set for us.

He exemplified the fruits of the Spirit outlined in Galatians 5:22 – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

To honor his memory and the life that he lived, I challenge you to live your life as he did -- striving to be like Christ (even if he never said it quite that way). Live for others instead of for self and work to make the world a better place through encouraging others, supporting education for all, giving generously and living the life of a servant -- serving those you know and love, serving those who need encouragement and serving those you may not know at all.

And, as he so often closed his notes and letters to us – Bless your bones and all that covers them.

Lots of love, Uncle B.

Henry Baxter Roney, Jr.
September 16, 1923 – August 25, 2010