

“Send Down A Cloud With A Silver Lining ...”

by Lynne Belluscio

I was in Ohio when I received the message from my daughter that Kermit had passed away. It didn't catch me by surprise. I had known that he had only a couple of months before the lung cancer would win, yet it was hard to keep Kermit down.

He'd be out driving - - against doctor's orders, and folks would say they had seen him out to dinner. The last time I saw him was at Scooter's and we talked about the video he had done. Chuck LePort had come to me, and said he had talked with Kermit and he was willing to be taped, talking about his life and growing up in LeRoy. The Historical Society Board voted to pay for the taping, editing and production. A couple of dates had been arranged, but Kermit had been in the hospital. So I was relieved to know that the taping had taken place. I wanted Kermit to know how valuable his memories were.

He would stop by the Historical Society every so often, and I would coax stories out of him. Growing up on North Street. Playing football. Discovering what prejudice was. Hearing him tell how furious his father was when he learned that Kermit and his friends had seen a cross burning in LeRoy. He told stories of his mother, a Native American - a hard working woman who had chosen to marry a black man and raised eight children together.

Kermit talked of his father - - a blacksmith who had left Culpepper, Virginia and moved to LeRoy in 1913. The Arrington family retained ties to Cullpepper - even to this day. Kermit's father worked at the Crusher. He was a man who could do almost anything he set his mind to. Kermit told that when they demolished the Barn Restaurant on East Main Road, his father was able to buy one of the bathrooms. He brought it home, put in the septic tank and lines, hooked up the new plumbing and then tore down the old outhouse. His father opened a barber shop in LeRoy, because the black families couldn't get their hair cut in LeRoy and had to go all the way to Rochester.

Kermit was #6 of the eight



Arrington children, and it was pretty obvious that they were raised believing that they could accomplish anything they set their minds to and race wasn't ever to be a hurdle.

He said that the hardest part and that for his brothers, was when he came back from military service, and the doors were still closed to get a beer with his friends. He wanted to serve in the fire department, and only the Hook and Ladder Company would "make an exception." He resented being told that LeRoy church doors were closed to him and that he should go to "his church" meaning the Second Baptist Church.

But lest you think that this is the only story that Kermit wanted to leave behind, you are mistaken. Kermit was imbued with the sense of fairness and justice. His parents instilled it in him. For a while after his football days were behind him, he continued his dedication to the sport as a referee and then as a baseball umpire. He probably would have been a great coach, but he chose to share his sense of fair play.

And in 1988, when he was elected as LeRoy's Justice of the Peace, Kermit had the opportunity to rise above the prejudice he had experienced. His sense of justice was based on what he knew. He knew that race, money - or

the lack of it, social position, or ethnic background, should never influence a decision. That no matter what your experiences in life have given you, that you have the power to do good.

Kermit never ever used his race or his hard-scrabble upbringing as an excuse. It made him stronger

and committed. And he was committed to this community - a community that gave him some bitter memories as well as good. And whether you agreed with him or not, by and far, the people of LeRoy would have to say that this community is a far better place because Kermit chose to stay here and call LeRoy home.

Some people know that Kermit played piano. Last year, when we received the Ingham piano, he stopped by and sat himself down and played for about a half hour. We told him the door was always open for him to come and play the Steinway. He played classical music, some rock and roll and a little modern jazz. At the end of his video, Kermit sits at his piano and plays a few songs - singing . . .

“Send down a cloud with a silver lining,
Lift me to Paradise,
Show me that River, Take me across,
Wash all my troubles away
Like that lucky old sun,
Give me nothing to do,
But roll around heaven all day.”

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