



Remembering the life of
Robert A. Cleland

1920 – 2010

Robert Andrew Cleland was born on October 19, 1920, and grew up in the close-knit Saint Anthony Park neighborhood of St. Paul, Minnesota. From the family home near the state fairground and the University of Minnesota's St. Paul campus, Bob flourished as a friendly, all-American boy who raised rabbits, had a paper route, and put on fireworks shows for the neighbors.

His parents, Spencer and Hazel (Boss) Cleland, steeped their four children in solid Midwestern values of justice, tolerance, hard work and community service. The family was active in the Congregational Church two blocks from their house.

Bob remembered, "I was very involved in the church youth group and sang in the choir. I was more interested in the soprano section than the preaching, but I did hear a lot of good sermons, and I picked up the idea that if you are part of a family that has a lot you are expected to return



to society some of that which you have been granted by God. Serving the people at the bottom — the lame, the blind, the poor, the orphan, the widow and so on — is part of the Christian doctrine.”

In 1939, in search of adventure, Bob hitchhiked from Minnesota to the New York World’s Fair. He later took three more solo hitchhiking trips, through 39 states and Canada, for a total of 18,000 miles. For several summers he worked with other energetic young people at Glacier National Park and developed a love for northwest Montana, which he visited many times as an adult.

After graduating in 1943 from the University of Minnesota, where he was a popular student leader, chorus member, chairman of the Student War Efforts Coordinating Committee and president of Sigma Nu fraternity, Bob served as a Navy officer during World War II.



During naval training in Chicago, he met Jean Kathryn Roling, of Wilmette. They courted by mail and rare visits, and were married on April 7, 1945. In 1946, Bob attended Northwestern University's business school and for the next three decades worked as a business manager and accountant at several Chicago-area firms.

Beginning in 1957, the Clelands made their home at 810 Forest Avenue in Wilmette, a turn-of-the-century brick house on a spacious lot with many trees. They both enjoyed children and were delighted with their substantial family of five sons and one daughter, born between 1947 and 1961: David, Stuart, Carter, Phillip, Trena, and Roger.

In 1949, taking to heart the religious principles and democratic ideals that informed his early life, Bob began volunteering with a group that sought to end racial and religious discrimination in the Chicago area. From then on he was a steadfast peace and social justice activist, and a



Human Race
 Nuclear Arms Race
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Talk

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Heads Committee
 Robert A. Cleland (above), 228 Forest Avenue, Wilmette, was recently elected chairman of the board of directors of the North Shore Citizens' Committee. Paul Albers, 2225 Wilmette Avenue, Wilmette, was named vice-chairman of the same meeting.

Other officers include Mrs. Elizabeth Krumer of Evanston as secretary and Dr. Meyer Stubbins of Highland Park as treasurer.

The North Shore Citizens' Committee was formed in 1948 to combat prejudice, discrimination and segregation based upon race, religion or national origin. The purpose of the committee is to receive, investigate, and act upon cases of discrimination involving housing, employment, and public services of all kinds.

leader in efforts to end the war in Vietnam and to push for civil rights, low-income housing, sanctuary for Salvadoran refugees, and especially nuclear disarmament. He protested environmental pollution for 50 years, from the earliest uses of DDT and other pesticides to irradiated food, depleted uranium, and nuclear waste.

Bob and Jean were faithful members of the First Congregational Church of Wilmette (UCC) for 54 years. Bob sang in the choir, maintained the church lawn and flowers, and served on many social action committees. In 2004, the Clelands joined the First Congregational Church of Evanston.

As members of the International Visitors Center of Chicago, the Clelands hosted visitors from over twenty nations. Scores of foreign guests passed through their home for stays ranging from one meal to a few weeks to (in more than one case) several years.



In addition to his unwavering commitment to peace in the world, Bob spread peace in the family's legendary backyard. There he created a children's wonderland, open to all, with a fort and a playhouse, slides, rope swings, a zip-line ("the pulley"), a sled run, igloos, backyard parties, fireworks, movies, picnics and bonfires — heaven on earth to two generations of Wilmette children.

"Mr. C.," as he was known, was an old-fashioned, kindly, and welcoming neighbor. He enjoyed having children come to the yard, showing them how to use the pulley and sled run, and guiding them on the rope swings. He always had an encouraging word along with a white cotton hankie for the inevitable tears and scraped knees.

Bob relished gardening, filming home movies, family dinners around the big kitchen table, humorous quips (his own and others'), fires in the fireplace, and vacations at the Rolings' summer lodge on Flathead Lake in



Montana. He was a skier and ice skater, a bird watcher, a wood chopper, and a prolific writer. He would often rise at 4:00 a.m., before his work day began, to compose issue-focused mailings and alerts, as well as frequent family newsletters that mixed politics, humor, news from 810 Forest, childhood reminiscences, and exhortations to action. He always brought his typewriter along for weekends at the Clelands' vacation home in Wild Rose, Wisconsin.



When he retired from the business world in 1976, Bob turned his attention to nuclear disarmament full time. For the next nine years he was the executive director of Chicago's Committee for a Nuclear Overkill Moratorium (NOMOR), and was a prominent speaker on military weapon systems and the arms race. In 1979, with funding from his church, he co-founded the North Suburban Peace Initiative.

In 1986, Bob was the Democratic candidate for U.S. Congress in the heavily Republican Tenth District, running against a popular incumbent. Distinguished Wisconsin senator William Proxmire appeared on his behalf, and Bob did a great job of keeping his opponent on his toes. Although Bob was defeated (as he expected), his well-respected campaign earned the endorsement of the Pioneer Press, which he considered something of a coup. In one of his later speeches, Bob said, "I consider myself an unrepentant liberal. 'Liberal' has become a pejorative word, but the



BOB CLELAND, CONGRESS. ✓



dictionary definition of liberal is ‘favorable to progress or reform, as in political or religious affairs; favorable to concepts of maximum possible individual freedom; free from prejudice or bigotry; tolerant.’ What’s wrong with all that?”

As an activist and educator, Bob gave hundreds of presentations at churches, universities, and community forums; organized many marches and demonstrations; lobbied political leaders; and composed countless signature ads, Op-ed pieces, leaflets, and broadsides. In the 1980s he taught a class on U.S. foreign policy at Columbia College in Chicago.

Bob often delivered mini-sermons to his family about the importance of civic engagement, based in the biblical teaching, “From those to whom much is given, much is expected.” He and Jean, an equally dedicated social change activist and a social worker at the North Shore Senior Center since 1977, were a beautifully matched couple and exemplary role models for their children.



Looking back on his life, Bob reflected, “I’ve been an extraordinarily lucky man. My childhood was very happy, and I then married into a wonderful family and helped produce a wonderful family. I can end my life feeling happy, knowing that I’ve made a difference at various points. I’ve been an involved citizen and done what we’re supposed to do in a democracy, which is to get involved and participate, from day to day and month to month.

“I’ve had a long and productive life, and it’s satisfying because I’ve seen the vindication of some of the efforts that I’ve made through the years.”

Bob and Jean Cleland marked their 65th wedding anniversary on April 7, 2010, four days before Bob’s death at age 89. He had been a devoted and steadfast husband, always Jean’s most ardent admirer and supporter.



Bob's final years — the last grains of sand falling quietly through the hourglass — were like his life: gentle, dignified, and peaceful. He never wavered in his positive, gracious, and humble temperament, and in his oft-expressed gratitude for his full life and loving family.



