

Lythcott - Memorium  
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There are in life a rare few friends who pass some indefinable barrier and become more than friends--they become kin. With George and with Jeannie, that sort of kinship for us, emerged and matured nearly 30 years ago. It all began during an especially stressful time as we were preparing at the Communicable Disease Center in Atlanta for the launch of a smallpox eradication-measles control program in 20 countries of West and Central Africa. The countries were among the poorest in the world and here the challenge could not have been greater. If successful, however, it was clear evidence that a global program might be feasible. It soon came to be seen as potentially the first phase of what could be a global smallpox eradication campaign. The fact that it was the first international program to be conducted by CDC did not make the task easier. George, by virtue of a distinguished prior career in Ghana was the obvious choice to be the on-site regional director in Lagos, Nigeria.

Few people then, or even now, appreciated the magnitude or complexity of the task which lay ahead. Twenty governments had to be persuaded that the program was a good idea, plans had to be developed, personnel recruited, and supplies ordered and delivered--all to be completed within 18 months. It was a tight schedule at best and the penalty for failure was the potential unraveling of a global effort. It isn't often that so much rests on a defined few events or rests so heavily on the shoulders of a single individual.

As you might expect of George, he remained remarkably unflappable throughout a long and difficult period--his quiet smile, his resonant baritone and gentle laugh diffusing all manner of hysteria. The ultimate, apparently insoluble crisis, revolved around Nigeria which accounted for more than half the region's population but was then teetering on the brink of civil war. Understandably, the head of state had other things than smallpox on his mind and refused to even discuss a possible program either with the U.S. Ambassador or any UN officials. George visited Lagos and within a week had

the President's signature on an agreement. How this was accomplished was never fully divulged but rumor has it that the President's favorite companion played an important, albeit unofficial role. George typically was not concerned as to who received the credit for an achievement but, rather, whether the job which needed to be done, was in fact, completed.

Had George achieved nothing beyond the eradication of smallpox in West and Central Africa, his professional career would have been proclaimed an overwhelming success. And, properly, George took considerable pride in that achievement. But, as well you know, he had not one but an entire series of successful professional careers.

This was a man who cared deeply and personally for his family and expressed that same degree of concern and caring for professional colleagues, for young persons seeking career guidance, and for the legion of individuals from all manner of organizations who so regularly sought his advice and help.

Today we are privileged to celebrate the life of a special friend and a brother who always, willingly, gave more than he received and left us all and the world, a richer place.