

## **Graveside Eulogy for Robert Alfred Burns, September 20, 2024 at the Texas State Cemetery in Austin, Texas**

I was asked to give a short biographical sketch of Bob. Most of the following is taken from his self-penned obituary as I feel that is “The Source” for how Bob wanted to be remembered.

Robert A. Burns (known to many of us as Bob, Bobby, Pappy) was born on Dec. 12, 1946, to A. C. Burns and Lillian Ruth “Sally” Duncan Burns in Paris, Texas and was the elder of their two sons. By his own smiling admission, a precocious child, who’s mind wondered toward adventures yet to be had, knights and sword fights, Robinson Crusoe, and Indian lore instead of his lessons at the JG Wooton School or Paris High.

Bob was an Eagle Scout and served for four years in the United States Marine Corps with two combat tours in Vietnam as a driver and Vietnamese interpreter. After returning from the war, he was a Paris firefighter and worked a number of seasons at the Philmont Scout Ranch. These were formative years for both Bob and all those that knew him at Philmont: staff and camper alike.

Deciding to use his GI Bill in mid-1970’s, he resumed his formal education, graduating from Paris Junior College and the University of Texas-Austin and returned to Paris to be a superintendent with Texas Parks and Wildlife at the William Bell Maxie House. During that tenure, he was awarded the Texas Award of Valor, rushing into a burning apartment building to save lives. In 1986 he was elected Lamar County Judge.

After moving to New Mexico, he became a member of the Cimarron Masonic Lodge, serving as its Worshipful Master and spent two terms as Cimarron Municipal Judge. Bob was a master plumber and electrician, owning several businesses in both Paris, Texas in Cimarron, NM.

Bob was preceded in death by his parents and younger brother, Ronald Joe Burns. He is survived by his former wife of 35 years, Katie Bryant, Bradley D. Newberry and wife; Stephanie and their sons Case, Will, and Buck Newberry. Son, Matt Talley and wife, Laurel. His grandchildren include: Carlton, Courtney, and Logan Talley, as well as two great grandchildren, Heather and Isiah Turner.

And a small tale of who Robert A. Burns was as I experienced him:

Bob and I would talk on the phone late into the night as he sipped a beer or whiskey and smoked his pipe in front of his omnipresent fire - we blathered

away about all sorts of things: relatives, historical figures and events, Texas in the 1960s and '70s, our lives, antiques, "gettin' the best deal", - all sorts of things, but books and authors were a constantly knitting thread in those conversations. We had very similar tastes in historical subjects of interest and our own bibliographies intercepted, weaved, overlaid, and traveled much the same path.

At some point we were talking about Bairdstown's Scottish roots and I mentioned a book that I had read about the Scots-Irish and "our peoples'" influence on the Southern propensity for acute individualism, dislike of classism, and a martial tradition - he stopped me mid-sentence and said, "You mean James Webb's Born Fighting!" I was shocked that he had read it (I shouldn't have been). We talked about Webb and the book for 10 minutes or so. At some point, Bob quoted the 1st stanza of a Tennyson poem that Webb included in his narrative. I was impressed - like really impressed. Bob was many things, many contradictory things, but few would look at him and expect memorized 19th century English verse to flow forth.

After reciting the lines, he grew a little silent and pensive and the conversation waned a little before it turned into a great story about AC when he was in Japan during WWII, which truly deserves to be told over a drink...

I will come back to the Tennyson piece though as it relates to Bob and this Solemn occasion.

The name of the poem is "Crossing the Bar" and it was written in 1889.

***Sunset and evening star,  
And one clear call for me!  
And may there be no moaning of the bar,  
When I put out to sea,***

***But such a tide as moving seems asleep,  
Too full for sound and foam,  
When that which drew from out the boundless deep  
Turns again home.***

***Twilight and evening bell,  
And after that the dark!  
And may there be no sadness of farewell,  
When I embark;***

***For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place  
The flood may bear me far,  
I hope to see my Pilot face to face  
When I have crost the bar.***

Regardless of what he had said about no service and no fuss, he would have loved this! All of us here. Those of us who loved him. This hallowed ground, this monument. It is a fitting place for his rest after that final embarkation.

I miss Bob. I miss his pipe, his drawl, the boyish twinkle in his eyes when he was being naughty, his cigars, his stories, that index finger stabbing into the table in time to emphasize a point he was making and I mourn the missed opportunities, the memories never made, and despise the thief of time that came with his sudden and untimely passing.