

Genuino J. Grande Memorial Article

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REFLECTIONS

***Genuino J. Grande
In Memoriam***

This issue remembers Genuino ("Bill") Grande, who died suddenly February 2, 1996, after a long and distinguished career in the field of labor-management relations. Bill Grande was an amazing man. This Paul Bunyan of a man lived the balanced life, what may be called the Greek Ideal. He cherished his family, his faith, the law, sports and the arts. Socrates would have been proud.

Bill's ancestors came from an area known as Abruzzi in Italy, east of Rome along the Adriatic Sea, most likely small farmers and fishermen. By the mid-nineteenth century both of his grandfathers had amassed certain wealth from grain milling, banking and farming. Bill's maternal grandfather, restless and ambitious, migrated to America to settle in the Boston area, where he established a comfortable life for himself and his family.

Bill's parents, both well-educated for their time, met in Boston, married and moved to Buffalo with their two young sons, Bill and Joseph. Mr. Grande worked for the American Brass Company. He also became a barber and worked at a shop in Kenmore.

Bill and Joseph attended Public School 79 in Buffalo. Bill went on to Seneca Vocational School where he excelled in his studies, and became a talented athlete, in

particular football. He did a fifth year at Kenmore High to prepare himself for college. His football coach at Kenmore was quoted as saying that "Bill is a potential professional football player in the making." Joe also attended Kenmore High and then went on to Buffalo State, UB and the University of Notre Dame where he earned his Ph.D. in history. He taught for decades at D'Youville College and before his retirement served as Vice-President for Academic Affairs. It was Joe who jokingly told his brother, Bill, that his name, Genuino Grande, translated from Italian meant "Real Great!" Joe says, "Bill never got over it."

Bill received scores of football scholarship offers from colleges all over the country. He settled on the offer from Canisius, a Division I program, largely because he needed to stay near home because of his father's poor health. One year later, Canisius dropped its football program, but continued to fund Bill's scholarship. Canisius made a major impact on Bill. He continued his athletic interests in wrestling and baseball (he, of course, was a catcher), but there was more. He studied hard under the Jesuits (at one point he gave serious thought to the priesthood), and took part in the musical life of the school. He had a splendid singing voice and sang with the Glee Club all four years, serving as president for three years. He took part in the annual musicals. His oldest son, Stephen says that one of his dad's most frightening moments came when they asked him to play the part of the captain in the production of *H.M.S. Pinafore*, a part which required him to wear tights. Steve says his dad later told him, "It took me ten minutes to compose myself before my entrance and, that was when I was in good shape!"

It was Bill's years at Canisius that taught him the balanced life. It gave him an outlet for his skills in sports, exposed him to the arts and deepened his already profound religious faith.

After graduation from Canisius, Bill went on to law school at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. It was there that he met Denise Bourgeois, a lovely young RN at George Washington University Hospital. She came from North Adams, Massachusetts where she grew up in a French-Canadian family. They married in 1957.

Bill joined the U.S. Marine Corps where he served in the judge advocate general's office. By January 1960, they had their first two sons, Steve and Bill. There would be seven sons in all. Second son Bill was born in the U.S. Navy hospital at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. Bill left the Marines in March 1960, at the rank of captain. After the Marine Corps, Bill moved his family to Pittsburgh where he took a position with the NLRB. After two years in Pittsburgh, the growing family came home to Buffalo, where Bill continued with the NLRB until 1969 when he joined the firm of Flaherty-Cohen.

It was at Flaherty-Cohen where Bill found his place in the law. He entered the labor-management area and became a brilliant negotiator. On occasion, he litigated a case, but it was his role as a negotiator that gave him his greatest personal satisfaction. His reputation in our community soon grew. He became known as the advocate who was always prepared, worked hard, never went back on his word and tried to settle contracts which were fair to both parties.

Law partner Joseph Randazzo says that Bill was always highly principled. "He was like a second conscience. Although self-confident and tough-minded, he was always sensitive to people. Bill spoke of workers and union leaders as the salt of the earth."

Joe believes that Bill learned this respect from his days as a laborer himself and observing his father as a factory worker and small businessman.

In the spring of 1989, *Business First* published an article about Bill. In that article local union leaders praised him. They said things like, "He's very well-respected. He does his homework and certainly forces everyone to do theirs, his professionalism leads to trust."

Law partner Jeremy Cohen spoke at Bill's funeral Mass and said, "He listened and guided you to find the way to resolve the trouble in your hearts and minds. . . [he had] high standards and expectations, [but], he listened and shared his thoughts without preaching or reproach ... He gave us hope when we had doubts, strength when we wavered, laughter when we needed it most."

Bill drew the most joy from his family. After his retirement, he and Denise traveled to places like Alaska and Italy. He said that he enjoyed Italy most. "You can look at just so many mountains and trees," he told the family, "but Italy was something else. Every minute is something special...and the food!"

Sons Steve and Bill say that all seven boys gave Mom and Dad a run for it. Seven boys, all busy with school and sports. Steve says, "My dad was always there. No matter how busy he was with the law practice, he made it to our games. We lived in a jock house. There could be two or three games to attend on one day. He made them all. And when you came off the field he couldn't resist a little coaching." Steve remembers that Dad had all of them singing at the dinner table. His favorites were *Stouthearted Men*, *The Marine Corps Hymn* and *Dear Old Girl*. It should come as no surprise that there was music at his funeral Mass. The Varsity Singers from St. Joseph's Collegiate Institute performed, and Bill's youngest son, Charlie sang *On Eagle's Wings*.

One of Bill's most pleasant experiences came when he was invited to speak at son Charlie's commencement from St. Joseph's Collegiate Institute in 1990. All seven boys attended St. Joe's, and the school elected to honor Bill. "He worked for hours on that speech," says Steve, "just trying to find the right words to share with those boys."

The IRRA of Western New York honored Bill as Citizen of the Year in 1989. On the plaque that he was awarded, it is written, "The Secret to Success in the Field of Labor Relations is Honesty and Integrity."

Son Bill says that, "His expert knowledge of the law was 10% of what made him successful. The remaining 90% was his ability to deal with people and help solve their problems." Rose Falsone, secretary for the IAM&AW, knew Bill for over 20 years. She told me "Everybody loved him. You just had to."

The same words keep repeating themselves when you talk to people about Bill's life. They most often are honesty, integrity and love. The last line of the poem, *That Man is a Success*, which son Bill read at his dad's funeral Mass, says it. Bill ... "always looked for the best in others and gave the best he had."

Perhaps son Bill summed it up best when he told me, "My father shared a great deal of wisdom with me during his life in the things that he said to me. But I will

remember him most for what he did not tell me. My dad never told me how to live a full and rich life, he just gave me the opportunity to watch him do it."