



Leland Homer Rayson
~ August 23, 1921 - January 8, 2001 ~

"It's Time"

Jim called me at work. It was about 10 am, Saturday morning. He said, "Mom wants everyone to come down here, right away." "OK... See you soon. How is he?" "Bad. 48 hours, max. They took out the I.V."

I told Ginger, "I gotta go." "Now, ya mean?" "Yeah." On the weekends, they give us a short crew. There's only two of us. During the week, we are three. I've worked compatibly with Ginger for a long time. We've been through the mill together. But I couldn't just leave her in the lurch.

It took about an hour before we were able to peel off one of the workers at a nearby plaza who had a slightly bigger crew. They understood. They felt for me and all had gone through similar times - like everybody else who's ever lived.

I called Leslie and told her. She and her two living sisters had lost both their father and then their mother in the last four years. She would start the ball rolling at home. We had to drop everything, start packing up and go! She had to run around town, cash a check, buy a few things, arrange to have someone pick up our mail and tell the schools the boys would have to skip next week.

I hurried up and drove home in a kind of daze. I figured I'd put gas in the car, check the fluids. I tried to brace myself for a brutal drive down to Florida of maybe 1,200 miles. I realized that I left my wallet at work. Great start! I stopped at home, anyway, saw Stanton, made a sandwich and went back to work. At least it was there.

I didn't know what to pack, so I just shoved some clothes from various drawers of my dresser into a suitcase and threw some papers and zines together into a briefcase.

I started calling airlines at O'Hare and Midway, trying to somehow catch an affordable deal. Fat chance! Even with the 50% "grievance discount" they were outrageous! Four hundred dollars apiece - one way! What a rip-off. It didn't help that it was the weekend and we were walk-up customers - desperate for a quick flight.

We continued getting ready. The boys were excited. They liked the idea of going to Florida, getting to go to the beach, seeing their cousins, flying in an airplane again and kissing the next week of school goodbye. This was tempered by their concern for their Grandpa.

My main concern was trying to figure out a way to get four people to Florida before my Daddy died, without going into debt. Then, I finally got through to Pan Am, which flies from Gary to Sanger, Florida, about 130 miles from Port St. Lucie. I really didn't want to have to drive. It's so long, takes forever and my car had a slow leak in one of the tires. Plus, we'd have to drive back, too!

We got real lucky! Usually their flights south are in the morning, but Saturdays, they also fly afternoons. It was about 2:30 or so by now. The flight was scheduled for 3:20 but was delayed until 3:50. Plus, it went directly to Florida, without the usual stop in southern Illinois.

The fares were much cheaper, but not "cheap." I asked about the grievance discount. He said "It only applies if the bereaved has already died." Once again, my compulsive affliction of instinctively telling the truth, gets me again.

So, we gave him our credit card number and bought four tickets that were non-refundable.

OK! The race is on! First, I had to waste a couple minutes being frantic and spastic, moving my arms, dashing pointlessly about and inducing panic in a pathetic attempt to hurry things up.

We finally shove everything in, jump in and take off. I figure we better take one of my patented "short cuts" to save time. At most, it would have cut a minute off our time. I take the wrong road and have to double back, trying to squiggle back over there to it. We end up at a dead end in front of some guy's house. Not good. That killed about ten minutes.

I get back on track, "save" my little minute and try to get there. Last time I went there was only three weeks ago and I got miserably lost. "Luckily," that flight was almost four hours late, anyway. So, at least I knew what I had to do to get there.

We finally get on I - 80. Oh, no! It's a truck parking lot! We only have to go maybe four miles on this, but that could easily take over an hour, at this nightmare rate! The kids are adding to the nerve fraying by asking if we're gonna miss our flight. That'd be a fine kettle of fish, wouldn't it?! Miss the flight, pay for it anyway and still have to drive all the way to Florida!

I see a guy drive the shoulder, so I follow him. I get off on the next exit and blindly grope my way in the general direction of the airport. I've never been here before and will never come back through this industrial wasteland of northwestern Indiana, west of Gary. Somehow, I guess right and take a crucially important right turn which puts me on Cline Avenue North, which is flowing freely, thank God!

Now, we may have a chance. It's already 3:35. We get there at 3:45. I park in front of the terminal grab the luggage and the kids and scurry in. Leslie parks the car. I repeat the frantic bit with the women behind the check-out counter. The flight's not delayed. We get our tickets and hustle through the metal detector.

There's only one problem. I keep setting off the alarm. I empty all my pockets and offer to take my belt off. They finally give up and let us go. We hurry onto the plane. They practically closed that big old door on my coat!

We had to walk almost to the back to find two rows with window seats that weren't over the wings. What a relief! Within two minutes, the plane is taxiing and then takes off. We got worried and asked a flight attendant to make sure they tossed our luggage on board. They did.

I tell you, Man, we flew down there! The whole flight couldn't have taken more than two hours! It seemed we got our "hot towels" our giant cookies, our cokes and our mints, one after the other. Those cookies can make you sick! Baked at some cheap bakery, somewhere, they freeze 'em, thaw 'em, freeze 'em, thaw 'em and then give them to you. We joked around about gremlins and tried to describe what the clouds going by looked like.

So all of a sudden, we were in Florida already! I told Leslie I'd walk over to Dollar, pick up a car and meet them back here. The guy said he didn't have any cars! I said, "What am I supposed to do?" "Where do you hafta go?" "Port St. Lucie." "Ew. Well, you might have to get a cab and spend the night in Orlando. There's Alamo, but I think they're closed."

Great! So, I marched down to Alamo. It looked closed, but I saw a guy inside and banged on the window. He let me in. I said I needed a car. He kinda winced. All of a sudden, a girl appeared and woke up a computer and I got hold of a car.

So, we shot over to my Mom's house in about two hours. Seemed everything we did took two hours that day. We burst in the door about 10:30 pm - the first wave of those called down from afar.

They were amazed that we got down there so fast. So was !! Jim was there and Bill, Guida and Miguel and my Uncle Glenn, my Dad's oldest brother. Everyone was pretty tired. My Mom insisted we sleep in her bed. She'd take the couch. So, we all hit the deck.

I couldn't sleep long, knowing I was in my Dad's bed, while he was a few miles away, dyin' in a hospital! I took a quick bath and woke up Jim. "Jim! Wake up! Let's go see Dad!" "Now?" "Yeah!" "What time is it?" "2:30." "OK. Let me get dressed."

Jim had been down for a while. Thank God! Mom couldn't have done without him. Dad couldn't move, anymore. They had to take him into the hospital. We pulled into the hospital parking lot and he parked by his favorite spot - "by the shed" - near a tree.

It felt so good to be with Jim. He's such a dear, sweet guy. He's the youngest of us. He knew the drill. He knew what to do, where to go, where the coffee was - where Dad was! You get so worried and nervous and anxious if you don't know anything, you know?

Dad had a sitter - a real nice, attentive caring nurse, who had a real soft spot for Dad, because he'd been so sweet, even while suffering so! He was sleeping when we arrived, but woke up soon upon hearing our voices. He couldn't "sleep" anyway, with his body shutting down on him!

He recognized me and even said my name! He still had a lot of strength in his grip, but he couldn't really talk. He also had pretty bad alzheimer's. I think he understood us, though. He'd smile and chuckle. He said "please" a lot. When we asked him a question, he could only say, "I don't know." Jim gave him water and ice chips. We hugged him and told him how much we loved him. We moved him around slightly, trying to make him more comfortable. Jim got a nurse to give him another shot of morphine. He was in pain.

It was a real relief to see him, talk to him, hold him, kiss him and hear his old, familiar soothing voice. At about five, we headed back. We went back to bed. I thought "He's still alive!" But, he was dying and going fast.

My Mother went to be with him, early in the morning. From then on, there was always at least one family member with him, often several. Leslie, Stanton, Stephen and I went over there about 11 am. Stephen looked at him breathing with difficulty, looking gaunt and such and told my Mom, "I think we should call the doctor." She appreciated that.

The rest of the day, we floated in and out of his room, hung out at the hospital snack shop and talked to each other.

The hospice people came and we had a family meeting with them. But it didn't matter, because Dad only had a few hours, anyway. He wasn't going anywhere nor would he need any "care." It was all a formality.

Bill did some valuable sleuthing work and found out about a place called Molly's House. It was two blocks away! Families can stay there for \$10/night as their loved one hovers near death at the hospital. Molly was a delightful young lady who died of leukemia at age 19. Her dream was to have such a place for families and the dream came true.

My family and I stayed there the next six nights. It was beautiful and very quiet. Other people stayed there too - Bill, Miguel, Guida, Lee, my Uncle Del and Aunt Carol, Tom and his family. It was a real blessing for us.

There was another couple that we talked to on our floor during breakfast. Their forty year old son had a terrible accident at work and he'd had several operations on his brain. But they thought they were beginning to see the light at the end of a long, dark tunnel. He was gonna make it! That put joy in our hearts for them.

More family kept arriving and coming into Dad's room. After Jim and I saw him in the middle of the night, he couldn't talk at all. We talked to him, held his hand and forehead and gave him ice chips. He grew more frail, gaunt and unrecognizable.

Monday was like Sunday. Tom, one of the doctors of our family, stayed with Dad all night. He had had a very rough, painful night.

We all came in the morning, not knowing what to do. By the afternoon, his condition was very grave. A nurse gave him a strong shot of morphine.

I found myself on one side of him, his hand in my hand and my other hand on his forehead. And I was whispering to him, "Daddy!... I will Daddy!... I know Daddy!" Tears were streaming down my cheek and off my chin. My Mom was on the other side and so was my uncle Del, Dad's other brother. He was talking one-on-one to Dad about when they were kids, brothers growin' up together. Maria was there. She's a nurse. She was always there - so helpful, like another daughter. She was another daughter. She's Jim's wife. A lot of people were there. I thought he might die, right then!

I let go to let someone else be near. Soon, like it was scripted, we all decided to break for dinner. We gave ourselves "shifts" to be there, regardless of whether anybody else was there or not. I got the 3 am - 6 am. slot. Mom stayed with Dad first.

We got back maybe an hour and a half or two hours later. But Dad died about ten minutes earlier. Only Mom, his wife of 56 years and Mother of his seven children was there with him, at the very end. It seemed somehow fitting.

He wasn't immortal and he was now still. He didn't look anything like himself. He'd suffered so and complained but little. He was gone! Taken from us, by that scourge, cancer! We'd have to pick up the considerable slack. He had lived one monumental life!

He wanted to be cremated, which was just as well, because he certainly didn't look like himself and Mom didn't want to "show" him. Mom will have a regular casket burial and she'll tuck his ashes in with her.

It was decided that the memorial service would be on Friday at one pm. at a church in Port St. Lucie. More family arrived. Tom's 7 wife Mary and their boys, Colin and Billy came, as did Mary's Dad, Bob. My sister Ann, her husband Buddy and son David came - from Hawaii! John, Kathy and their children Jessica, Chloe, Bobby and Bradley all came. Mom's brothers and their wives George, Phil, Margaret and Dorothy were all there. Bill's daughter Vanessa came and brought her baby, Alexis - my Daddy's one and only great grandchild. Unfortunately, a few couldn't make it. Ann's son Danny and daughter Sarah were missed, as were Jim's sons, Chris and Jimmy. My Father's sister Rohana and her husband couldn't make it, either. I know they all really, really wanted to be there, as did all of the rest of us. They were with us in spirit.

On Tuesday, my Mother and I made the rounds to the funeral home and the cemetery. We hashed out the details of the service, what cards and statements to use, the music, how to arrange pictures and flowers and things like that. She wanted to intern Dad's ashes in the grave, which was a ridiculous expense. We visited the gravesite, which was in the Veteran's section.

Dad was a Lieutenant Commander in the Naval Reserve at the end of his military career. He was in the thick of things in the Pacific, during WWII, having led two invasions in small boat landings. We wanted to make sure the funeral director would procure a naval presence at the memorial. He said he'd get "one of the services." I said, "No! It's gotta be the Navy! I'll call 'em, if you want!" The Navy came and did an emotional flag ceremony, which capped off the service.

The grave was just a small piece of land, sort of near a tree. I assured Mom that we'd come visit, sometimes... She asked me what happened at Grinnell College, which I dropped out of my freshman year, in the spring of 1972.

On Wednesday, me and my three younger brothers, Lee, Tom and Jim, along with my Dad's brother, Glenn - he's 85! went deep sea fishing. We asked Glenn if he was up for it and if seasickness would bother him. He said there was a time a while back that he got a little queasy - on the North Sea. The North Sea? That's like a gigantic washing machine! Up against him, we were just little kids in a bath tub with our rubber duckies. Stanton and Stephen talked their way on board, too!

I really dislike going out on the ocean like that, what with seasickness, etc. It's like a rollercoaster ride you can never get off. But the boys loved it. Several men in their twenties were curled up in fetal positions the whole trip! I saw it as a rare chance to be with my three younger brothers and Uncle. We caught a few fish and Tom won the pool for catching the biggest one. He split the dough with the deckhand, who filleted our fish. Stanton caught a fish!

My family went to the beach, too. I got my obligatory sunburn, but didn't really go swimming - too cold! We waited for Friday, talking and meeting each other and getting ready. Early on Friday, we went back to the beach to watch the sun rise over the ocean. It was an eerie, quiet sight, but it was overcast and things just got sort of lighter. 8

On Friday, everybody got dressed and went over there. It was a small, simple church, near my Mom's house. The minister talked a while and then so did several of us. Maria helped make a wonderful collage of pictures of Dad. I was on the verge of bursting out in tears the whole while, like everybody else. Bill put together a real good little brochure with words and pictures that was made available. Dad's zine, *War-time Experience Remembered* was also available.

After we'd all spoken, the three Navy people solemnly strode up the aisle, carefully unfurling a big flag, then refolding it. Then Taps was played. Then the woman, I think she was a Lieutenant Commander herself, received the flag and presented it to my Mother. Her words were strong and clear and stirring. Several grown men lost it at this point. I thought "We got the Navy, Mom!"

Then it was over and there was a small coffee and rolls reception. We all headed over to Mom's house for a sort of reception / banquet. We picked up a bunch of food waiting for us at a nearby store and a neighbor's refrigerator. We ate and talked and took a lot of pictures.

People began to filter out, some having to catch flights that night or the next day, including us. It was the first time I'd been with all my brothers and sister in a very long time. It was a once-in-a-lifetime situation.

The next morning we drove back to the airport. Once again, I set off the alarm. They figured out that it was my shoes. They'd manufactured a metal strip into them.

We came home to a mountain of mail and newspapers. It was nice to be home. My Dad's dead! I think about him all during every day. Condolence cards and letters poured in and I could hear the voices of the people whose words I was reading. That helped. I'm still on the verge of tears. I'm gonna be more kind to people and make a constant effort to check my temper. He was the consummate gentleman. Like Tom said, "He was a great father!"

My Mother has decided on having a memorial service for him on June 9th, up here in Chicagoland, as well. After all, this is where he really made his mark and many people knew him and loved him. I was able to make some arrangements to ensure that we could have it at the Unitarian Church in Park Forest. It's a beautiful little church, set in a wondrous piece of land in the woods. It will be gorgeous in early June with all of the wildflowers, leaves and other greenery.

It will be a sort of celebration!

Molly's Dream



Molly Sharkey
1973-1992

Most teenagers dream of senior prom, graduation and college, but not Molly. Molly's dream was to build a house in Stuart where families of critically ill patients could stay while their loved ones were in the hospital.

Molly Sharkey was diagnosed with Myelocytic Leukemia, a very rare form of cancer, in 1986. She and her family traveled the country seeking treatment. Most doctors and hospitals held little hope and would not accept her as a patient. In some cities they were lucky enough to find a Ronald McDonald House, but most often there was nowhere convenient for the family to stay. It was this experience that led to Molly's dream.

Her family has never forgotten the comfort they felt while staying at the Ronald McDonald Houses. It enabled them to stay close to Molly at a time when she needed her family the most.

Molly was 18 when she died of Leukemia on May 17, 1992. She was visiting one of her favorite places, DISNEY WORLD, fulfilling one of her dreams.

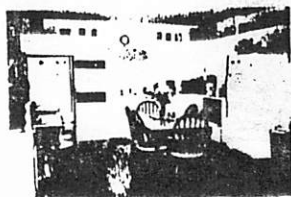
In honor of Molly and her selfless dreams, her family and friends decided to make her dream come true.

MOLLY'S HOUSE

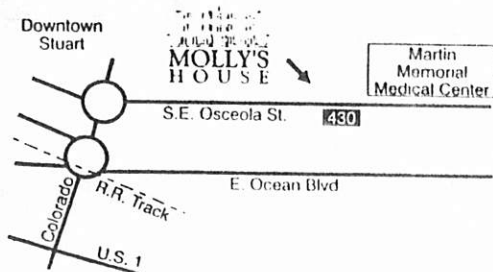
*"Keeping Families
Together"*



430 S.E. Osceola Street
Stuart, Florida 34994
561-223-MOLY



The house is located within easy walking distance to Martin Memorial Medical Center and Downtown Stuart.



IN LOVING MEMORY OF
Leland Homer Rayson

BORN

August 23, 1921
Oak Park, Illinois

ENTERED INTO REST

January 8, 2001
Stuart, Florida

SERVICES

Friday, January 12, 2001 at 1:00 PM
First Presbyterian Church of Port St. Lucie

OFFICIATING

Dr. James Nimmo
&
Delwin Rayson

✠

*God, grant me the serenity
to accept the things
I cannot change,
courage to change
the things I can,
and wisdom
to know the difference.*

✠

Forest Hills Funeral Home & Memorial Park, Palm City, Florida

IN LOVING MEMORY



Leland H Rayson
Aug. 23, 1921 - Jan. 8, 2001

Leland H. Rayson was born August 23, 1921, in Oak Park, Illinois, the youngest of four children of Beatrice Rowland Rayson and Ennes Charles Rayson, a teacher and certified public accountant. While attending the University of Rochester, in Rochester, NY, "Lee" Rayson enlisted in the U.S. Navy's V-12 program, subsequently completing midshipmen's school at Colombia University. In 1944, while in small boat command training in Ft. Pierce, Florida, he married Barbara Chandler. Lee Rayson's WW II experience was in the Pacific theater as an officer on an LST (landing ship tank). He led two waves of amphibious assault landings at Leyte and the Lingayen Gulf in the Philippines and participated in the invasion of Okinawa. He eventually retired from the Naval Reserve with the rank of Lieutenant Commander. After WW II, Lee completed his degree at Rochester and returned to Oak Park. He then entered and graduated from Northwestern University Law School.

In 1946, their first child, and only daughter, Ann, was born. Ann was followed by John in 1949, William, 1951, Anthony, 1953, Leland, 1955, Thomas, 1959, and James in 1961. Throughout these years, Rayson, a hard worker - his first job was chopping wood for a dentist at 20 cents an hour - built a successful law practice that still bears his name.

In Tinley Park, Lee Rayson became actively involved in Democratic politics, serving as Police Magistrate and Justice of the Peace before winning a seat in the Illinois State Legislature, where he served for 7 terms until retiring in 1977. In the House, Lee's major achievements were in the fields of civil rights and women's rights. He sponsored bills to legalize abortion and reform what he considered draconian drug laws. He was also an avid conservationist who introduced legislation to reduce vehicle emissions and conserve water. He introduced and saw passage of the first crime victim's compensation law in the State of Illinois. A tireless worker's rights advocate, and unflinching opponent of capital punishment, Lee was a favorite of the reform-minded Independent Voters of Illinois, who considered him the most independent, uncorruptible and progressive member of the House.

While Rayson enjoyed successes in the legislative arena, his political activity reached far beyond the halls of government. Through joining the Civil Rights movement in the early 60's, Lee Rayson learned of the power of mass action. He traveled to Mississippi to help free arrested activists from jail, and when the movement headed north, Lee brought his family to rallies and marches in Chicago and Milwaukee led by Martin Luther King and others. Lee Rayson understood Martin Luther King's message that the fight for Civil Rights could not achieve its goals without an end to the War in Vietnam. While others in his generation failed to understand, Lee Rayson identified with the Peace movement early on. In 1968, when Lee was a delegate to the Chicago Democratic Convention, he fought against the war both on the convention floor and in peaceful protests outside the convention, where he was among thousands tear-gassed by the National Guard. In 1971, Lee had the honor of traveling to France as a delegate for the Chicago area to the Paris Peace Talks, seeking to help end the war.

Lee Rayson maintained his concern and awareness of international issues throughout his life. In 1987, at the age of 65, he joined a delegation of Illinois lawmakers and activists to the impoverished, war-torn nations of Honduras and Nicaragua. The delegation studied the role of Illinois National Guard troops detailed to Honduras, and looked into the deaths of two young Illinois guardsmen. In Nicaragua, Rayson learned firsthand of the devastating effects of the prolonged Contra war on the people, and especially the children of that land.

Somehow, Leland Rayson accomplished all of this and much more while fathering a huge family, and shepherding, with wife Barbara, all seven of their children through the turbulent 60's and 70's. Once the children were grown, Lee Rayson retired and bought a home with Barbara in Pt. St. Lucie, Fl. He continued to enjoy fishing, skiing, tennis, cards, a good argument, rooting for his beloved White Sox, Bears and Bulls, and spending time with his ever-growing family throughout his retirement years, until illness took him from us.

Leland Rayson taught us to take a big bite out of life, and that quitting is not an option. His vision, integrity and courage remain an inspiration to us all. This legacy of devotion to both family and social justice is now carried on by his children and grandchildren, who often dedicate their efforts to promoting change on labor, women's rights, civil rights, antiwar and environmental issues.



Leland H. Rayson and family, 1962

(From left to right, back row) Ann, James, Leland, Barbara, Thomas, John (front) Anthony, William, Lee

In addition to three siblings – Glendon, of Baltimore, Delwyn, of Bradenton, Fl; and Rohana Rattay, of Chicago – Leland Rayson is survived by his wife, Barbara, who lives in Pt. St. Lucie, and seven children, 15 grandchildren, and one great granddaughter.

Lee Rayson's favorite charity is receiving donations in his name. Contact the Southern Poverty Law Center at 400 Washington Ave Montgomery, Al 36104



Lee and Barbara Rayson were married for 56 years, from 1944 – 2001



Lee Rayson enjoying his great granddaughter, Alexis Marie Jones, at his home in Pt. St. Lucie in April, 2000

Requiem for a Loving Heart
Family Reflections in Honor of Leland Homer Rayson
(August 23, 1921 - January 8, 2001)

Delwyn Rayson:

I'm trying to remember the high points in our experiences with Lee. He was a very intense kind of young man, when we were young. He participated in all of our athletic endeavors - even though he couldn't throw from shortstop to first base! He had to throw to Glenn, who was the older brother and pitcher and he relayed on to first.

But, he insisted on being a part of our life together in Oak Park and he stayed with us through all the years of education which followed. After those early years, we went our ways. Glenn, the oldest of the brothers and myself went to the University of Rochester. Lee started at Iowa College, I believe, but he insisted on joining us at Rochester and it was not long before he did follow. There he got to know well his wife-to-be Barbara, who came to Rochester from Oak Park.

The days at Rochester are not particularly distinguished, but toward the end of his career there, the skies darkened and the reality of war in Europe became apparent. He went into training - Midshipman training - which led him to New York and a special course, preparing himself to be an officer in Landing Ships Tank, a very necessary and dangerous part of the Navy. It was there, that when possible, family members saw him briefly. I remember when he shipped from there and he completed that training. He was met in the southern United States by Barbara and my mother, before he shipped off to the Pacific.

Before that time, however, there was a happy interlude at a nearby place, Fort Pierce, where Barbara came and they were married and had happy days - before she had to go back to Oak Park and he went on.

He had a tough time on an LST in the Pacific. Went through some heavy actions, especially at Okinawa. I don't remember all the details of his experience there, but I know he was faithful to his job and had to survive a very unorganized and angry Captain, who took his feelings out on the crew quite often.

But he survived it and came home to us after that long and painful stint and he went to the University of Rochester, where Glenn was in grad school and I was finishing up. He graduated and went back and lived with Barbara and began the nurture of a large family of one lovely girl and six irascible boys.

It all worked out, although it didn't seem possible and they lived together in Tinley Park. He went through many happy experiences with his family and with the rest of us as well.

I don't know much about events in those days. We were all concerned about our own families. But he was faithful to the end, to himself, and to Barbara and to the kids. He was a guy, who as a lawyer believed in justice and peace and worked hard to move those values along. He went for several years to the Illinois State Legislature and worked on bills to that end and accomplished more than anyone thought he would accomplish.

At the end of his career, he continued to work at his law office in Tinley until, the years went by, as happens to all of us. Our families and ourselves grew older until his final days, when he was hit hard with cancer and struggled with it and finally succumbed to it.

He was a dear brother and a dear friend. He was faithful in the church. He didn't think of himself as a saint, but there are many unacknowledged saints in the world. I think he was one of them and so I think of that line from that hymn:

*For all the saints
Who from their labors rest
Whom thee by faith
Before the world confessed
The name will be for Jesus
Forever blessed.
Hallelujah!
Hallelujah!*

Ann Rayson:

I just wanted to briefly talk about the importance of my father in my life and it really focuses on the Civil Rights Movement. When I was in high school, he took some of us on various marches. He took me in 1964 to Pittsburgh, where we marched before the National Methodist Church caucus to try to get the church to integrate and adopt a civil rights platform. That failed, but I remember marching all night with other people from around the country.

Then in 1967, he took some of us up to Milwaukee to march with Father Groppi and Dick Gregory for open housing. Also, he took us to Operation Breadbasket in Chicago - South Chicago - where we saw the young Jesse Jackson starting his political career.

There were other experiences I had in college, marching with Martin Luther King in Boston, for open housing. I never went to the South with my father, but I think his work with the Civil Rights Movement in various places involving integrating white churches in Jackson, Mississippi for example, and working with Black college students in Tupelo and Jackson, had a huge influence on my life later, when I became a professor of African-American literature.

It's been a continual challenge that I think is important to face because we come from a position of middle class, upper middle class really, white privilege and we should never forget that we're just here by chance. We need to constantly be aware of that and be aware of the injustice that is everywhere around us.

So, I really thank my father for giving me this kind of upbringing and awareness of the larger world.

John:

I want to thank everyone for coming. It's comforting to be among so many family members and friends. And I'm particularly moved by the presence of my colleague of ten years, when I was in the Florida legislature, and now he's State Senator, Ken Pruitt, from Port St. Lucie. Thankyou for being here.

It's a difficult thing and it was hard for me to try and think of what I might say. So, if you'll indulge me, I just put down a few reflections of a child:

"Rope belts, Indian guides and walleyes. Baseball with cards, bridge and blackjack. "Tennis anyone? Don't fall, the water's cold!"

Who took us there?

Invasions, demonstrations, causes. Leyte, the Lingayen Gulf, Okinawa, Mississippi, Milwaukee, Chicago. Open housing, women's rights, Vietnam, migrant's rights, the Paris Peace talks, Nicaragua.

Who will lead us?

The Chicago Foreign Relations Council, the Goodman Theatre, Pete Seeger concerts, books! - lots of books!

Who will read them?

Barbara, Bobbie, Bobs - his constant, his partner, his wife, who loved her.

Mikva was there and Sidney Yates and Adlai III. Kennedy, Camelot, Tinley Park.

Who fought the fight?

There were four of us in the firm - all worthy, but one leader, one teacher, one father.

The Sox, the Bears, the Bulls. "There's Little Louie! There goes Sweetness! Michael is soaring!"

He, *we* are there.

Husband, father, grandfather, friend, where are you?

You are all around, in, about us."

Anthony:

I'd like to read a statement I composed two days ago. It's called:

Dad Lives in All of Us

We all love Dad for the special way he treated each and every one of us. Great family adventures invariably had Dad in the thick of things. He enlivened all the fun. The way he carried himself with other people taught us how to be righteous and moral and principled and tough.

He let kids run around, scream and yell, have fun and go nuts. He played along right there with us. But, when something had to be said or done, he made no bones about it and didn't fool around.

We all emulate him in the way we live our lives. We have a unique ability, resolve and confidence in the way we feel what we must do and how that should be done. Dad accomplished a helluva lot, but he absolutely refused to compromise his beliefs. He was a fearless, articulate, eloquent crusader for social justice amidst a sea of bigotry and ignorance.

He worked hard, played hard and took care of us - especially when we needed him the most!

Dad now lives in all of us and I say we use that strength to become more compassionate, more caring and more committed to advocate our beliefs in our own way, that in our hearts we know to be the right thing to do.

Goodbye, Dad! Thanks for everything.

William:

I didn't prepare remarks, but I've been talking about what it was like to grow up with Lee Rayson for a Dad, with my brothers and the people here.

You know, we all went through the teenager phase (the sixties) and it was a tough time for families all over the country. The war in Vietnam was exploding. You couldn't avoid thinking about it and learning about it. The more we learned about it, the more we realized that something very wrong was taking place.

Like Ann said, my Dad got us involved in civil rights. I went on the trip to Pittsburgh and Milwaukee.

I remember I was just eleven. He packed us up in a car. Martin Luther King was marching in Cicero. There were racists there - swastikas. They were throwing things. It was just incredible and scary. But I saw that something really important was happening.

The next year, we all went to Soldier Field. Martin Luther King spoke at Soldier Field and it was just incredible! I's never been to Soldier Field and it was just packed!

I got to be so proud of my Dad for having that kind of courage. Because when you talked in school, the other kids, they didn't know anything about it. They were just bigotted and they got that bigotry from their parents, you know?

When we entered, when I entered that rebellious stage. I'm lookin' 18
I'm about 16, it's maybe 1967, you know, we got really against the war in Vietnam. We criticized Dad for being involved with the Democratic Party, which was still led by LBJ. But it was just so hard to try to stay ahead of him because he rapidly realized what was wrong in Vietnam.

Even as a delegate to the Democratic Convention, he joined us out there in the streets in a peaceful demonstration. We got teargassed together, which was something really scary for both of us. And then in 1971, he went to the Paris Peace talks.

So, in the other little ways we found to rebel, uh, you live and learn and find that Dad was right in all those things.

Now we find ourselves - not *trying* to be like him, but *bein'* like him without trying to. We got something on our mind and someone's bothering us about something, we go, "Eh - eh - eh - eh - eh - eh!" And, like Tony said, let the kids have fun, up until a certain point and then say, "OK! That's it!"

He had tremendous courage and he was so far ahead of his time. Unfortunately, many of the issues he fought for are still burning issues today. Capital punishment, if anything, is *worse* now! It's rampant in this country and in this state.

Civil rights, voting rights! The last election shows us that Black people are *still* being denied the right to vote in so many ways. There's so much work still to be done, and I'm confident that those of us here that understood his example, can pick up the slack and carry forward.

Thomas:

I was real little when those things were going on in the sixties, but in our family we were so intuned to it! Even as a little fourth grader in 1968, I was so proud of my father and my whole family and what was going on in the Vietnam War and how it affected everybody.

From the very beginning, my Dad was such a good-hearted person, in the very simple way of loving and respecting all things. He taught us when we were kids examples like taking bugs and spiders outside and gently putting them in the yard and letting them go instead of killing them. Try and catch a fly and take it outside. "I'll give you a dollar if you do it!" We loved that! I was always looking all over the house for crickets and spiders.

And then! Things like that stick with you. Anytime I saw a cricket or a spider, you take it outside. And there'd that basic teaching to respect all life. Everything is precious - everyone! - and to give to others who need it the most.

He never said it and he was never very religious, but it was basic fundamental followings of Christ - to give to the poor, to help, to forgive - to love. Those basic things he did everyday in every way.

He'd come up - sometimes we'd go to his office and hang out and get a Coke - just a fun place. They had a water cooler there, air conditioning... It was pretty nice. People would come into the office, you know, older people, Black people, would come in and say, "Your father...!" They'd start crying. "Your father has done so much for me! He's done so much! I love that man!"

People would do that just out of the blue. They didn't know who I was. They could tell there was a family resemblance. So many times in my life they would come up to me and say what a great man he is, and his tremendous feelings for his family. He was a *great* father!

One thing that everybody knows who knows my Dad, is he was a goofball. He was one of the funniest persons I've ever met in my life. I don't think anyone could make me laugh - maybe Johnny - the way he does. He loved to laugh.

I have many fond memories when I was a teenager. Everyone was out of the house and I was basically alone in a big house and Dad and I got to spend a lot of time together.

He'd come home and we'd shoot pool. We'd play chess and we'd watch Monty Python. We had a real bond then and it was really a nice time because it's a tough time for a young man, a fifteen - sixteen year old boy. We spent a lot of quiet time together and had some great memories.

We used to play pool and he'd take out his hankkerchief, usually he'd make a stupid mistake sooner or later, throwing the eightball or whatever. If you were ahead shootin' the eightball, he'd go like this - right in front of the pocket, when you were trying to get it in. It would definitely mess with your mind and it was *great!* It taught you sportsmanship.

He taught so many things without sayin' it. We played chess and if you'd get him in checkmate, he'd say, "Ah, but what about the fly?" He'd pick up - the rule was if you could pick up the king with one finger and move it anywhere on the board and drop it from an inch, without falling, that's a free move. We adopted that rule in chess and I *still* use that rule.

He used to *love* Monty Python and the Three Stooges. He knew how to laugh and he knew how to live. He told me, many many times, "Hold fast to the spirit of youth." I live by that and he always did.

And, uh, you know, he *loved* the way it all happened - even though it was crazy. There was a lot of strife in our family. Things got kinda crazy. You know when I asked him, "Would you do it all over again?" He said, "Without hesitation!"

He loved Ma very much. Couldn't live without her! And, another thing, it's another lesson. I think we all know. We were there - what a fighter he is! My Dad just gave us another gift - right at the end, to never give up. And, he fought and he struggled. He wanted to be there. And he was there.

It gives me a lot of inner strength. Anytime, hard times, hardship - any of us - that *fight* that "Keep goin' on! You can do it! Keep sluggin'!" That's an amazing skill and talent that he had to do - and gave - even to the very end.

I don't know how many people could have fought harder than he did with this cancer. He was a trooper from the very beginning and I miss him very much and he really lives on. *I know that!*

Miguel:

I'm nervous right now, being up on stage for the first time. I didn't know too much about my Grandpa until I read what was written by my Dad (William) yesterday. I wish he was still alive so I could say how proud I am for what he's done for all these people.

It really was painful just to see him laying down there like that. I couldn't deal with it.

I don't know what to say. All I know is that I love him dearly. He's gone, you know? So, we just gotta deal with it. He's in a better place now, you know? He's in Heaven. That's where he belongs - with Martin Luther King and everybody. I told my Dad, I dream of him sitting down with Martin Luther King and JFK and everyone like that, you know, and just partyin' and stuff, in Heaven.

At first, I wanted to be a rap star on stage and look at me now, on stage. It's a good feelin'. I just wanted to say that I'm sorry for his death and I love him so much and I wish he was still livin'. That's all I've got to say.



Leland Rayson in 1972

Barbara:

Since Lee died, I've had a hymn running through my mind constantly, and it's a missionary hymn and I was trying to understand why it was this particular hymn. You all know it.

*We've a story to tell to the nations
That shall turn their hearts to the right
A story of truth and mercy
A story of peace and light.
And the darkness shall turn to dawning
Dawning to noonday bright
And God's great kingdom
Shall Come on Earth
The kingdom of love and light
The kingdom of love and light.*

So, it's a great hymn but why was that of all the great hymns the one that I was remembering?

I finally figured it out! You don't have to be in the church. You don't have to be a pastor to be a missionary. Sainthood? Well, I was the wife! I'm not sure. But he was *certainly* a missionary and devoted his life as his children and grandchildren have told you, to the causes in which he believed, which were truth and justice and fighting prejudice and peace and mercy. And he was a blessing to all of us.

I was privileged to be his wife - even when he let the dogs do anything they wanted to! He could never deny children or dogs - and at times it was a little much for me.

I recognize what a wonderful, free and loving spirit he had - and how lucky I was to be his wife.



Truly one of a kind

Lee Rayson was a singular figure: an idealist legislator from a middle-of-the-road southwest suburban district who fought for liberal causes even when his was often a lone voice.

And for that display of courage, he was returned to Springfield term after term, even by voters who did not necessarily agree with his views. Those voters believed and appreciated his oft-stated sentiment that he would rather be right than re-elected.

A World War II military officer, Rayson came to Tinley Park with his wife Barbara in 1949. A lawyer with an office on Oak Park Avenue, Rayson was also co-publisher of the *Palos-Worth Reporter*. And he became involved in local Democratic politics, elected to the state House in 1964. He was elected to six more terms before retiring in 1977.

Every single term, he was chosen "best legislator" by the liberal Independent Voters of

Illinois, which lauded his sponsorship of bills for legalizing some abortions, reducing the voting age, requiring campaign finance disclosure, compensating victims of crimes.

An affable man with a sharp wit, Lee Rayson was also a mentor who urged young people to get involved in politics and government. His young legislative aide, Terry Steczo, ran for and won a seat in Springfield after Rayson's retirement, benefiting heavily from Rayson's support, guidance and encouragement.

In his latter years, Rayson and his wife retired to Florida but returned to the Southwest Suburbs often to see their children, friends and associates. Rayson's shingle is still on the law office in Tinley.

Lee Rayson was 79 when he died last week. One of the last of the true liberals, he will be missed by those he inspired, and even those with whom he disagreed. He was truly one of a kind.

Leland H. Rayson, 79, progressive southwest suburban state representative in the 1960s and '70s who was part of a bloc of luminary liberals in the legislature that included Abner Mikva, Paul Simon and Anthony Scariano; in a 12-year tenure in the Illinois House, he pushed for legalizing certain abortions, making possession of small amounts of marijuana a misdemeanor and reducing the voting age to 18; Jan. 8, in Stuart, Fla.

Leland Rayson, 79, political patriarch

BY ELENA CABRAL

ecabral@herald.com

Leland H. Rayson, who served six terms in the Illinois House of Representatives and later saw his son John become a Florida lawmaker representing Pompano Beach, died of cancer Monday in Stuart, Fla.



RAYSON

He was 79.

An advocate of civil rights who took his children to march with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in Chicago in the 1960s, Rayson was an advocate of women's rights and workers' rights, as well as a staunch opponent of capital punishment, according to his family.

"His was an amazing life, really, the biggest influence of my life," said John Rayson, who has practiced law in Fort Lauderdale since term limits ended his tenure in the Florida House last year.

In the 1960s, Leland Rayson sponsored bills to legalize abortion and to reform drug laws he considered too severe, such as felony penalties for marijuana users, his son said. Leland Rayson introduced legislation to reduce vehicle emissions and to conserve water and fought

for passage of Illinois' first crime victims compensation law, John Rayson said.

Leland Rayson, who was born in Oak Park, Ill., served in the Navy during World War II, taking part in amphibious assaults in the Philippines and in the invasion of Okinawa; he retired from the Naval Reserve with the rank of lieutenant commander.

Rayson earned a law degree from Northwestern before entering politics as a Democrat. Following an unsuccessful bid for Congress, Rayson won a seat in the Illinois House of Representatives in 1964, serving until 1977.

In addition to three siblings — Delwin of Bradenton, Fla.; Glendon, of Baltimore; and Rohana Rattay of Chicago — Leland Rayson is survived by his wife, Barbara, who lives in Port St. Lucie, and seven children: Ann, of Honolulu; John, of Pompano Beach; William, of Pembroke Pines; Anthony, of Monee, Ill.; Leland, of Oak Forest, Ill.; Thomas, of Menasha, Wis.; and James, of Manhattan, Ill.

Rayson had 15 grandchildren and one great-granddaughter.

Services for Rayson will be at 1 p.m. Friday at the First Presbyterian Church of Port St. Lucie.

Longtime Southland state Rep. Rayson, 79, dies

Wednesday, January 10, 2001

By Steve Metsch
Staff Writer

Leland H. Rayson, 79, who served six terms representing the Southland's 9th District in the Illinois House of Representatives, died Monday at a hospital in Stuart, Fla.

Mr. Rayson, who most recently lived in Port St. Lucie, Fla., had been suffering from melanoma, his son, John Rayson of Pompano Beach, Fla., said Tuesday.

A funeral service will be held at 1 p.m. Friday at the First Presbyterian Church of Port St. Lucie.

Mr. Rayson, formerly of Tinley Park, served in the House from 1965 to 1977.

Mr. Rayson, a Democrat, was a proponent of civil rights, women's rights, and the environment, and also took a stand opposing the Vietnam War. When the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., marched in Chicago to support housing for blacks, Rayson and his family were there, too.

"He taught us to stand for what was right and that there's worth in every human being," John Rayson, an attorney and former Florida state legislator, said.

"He taught us to take a stand and do what's right, to oppose oppression and racism, and other things that diminish people," he said.

Mr. Rayson sponsored bills to legalize abortion and reform what he considered draconian drug laws.

An avid conservationist, he introduced legislation to reduce vehicle emissions and conserve water. He also introduced and saw the passage of the first crime victim compensation legislation in the state.

Mr. Rayson was born on Aug. 23, 1921, in Oak Park. His family moved to Springfield, Mass., in 1931, and to Pittsford, N.Y., in 1934.

While attending the University of Rochester, he enlisted in the Navy's V-12 program and completed midshipmen's school at Columbia University.

He married Barbara Chandler in 1944. She was at his side when he died.

Mr. Rayson served in the Pacific during World War II and led two landings in the Philippines and in the invasion of Okinawa.

After the war, he completed his undergraduate's degree at Rochester and later graduated from the Northwestern University Law School. His family moved to Tinley Park in 1949. The law practice he started still bears his name. He also was co-publisher of the Worth-Palos Reporter.

In the 1950s, he was a township assessor, police magistrate and justice of the peace before unsuccessfully running for Congress in 1958. He retired from the Illinois House in 1977.

Tinley Park Mayor Ed Zabrocki called Rayson "the white-haired gentleman of Tinley Park who was very liberal in his ideas."

"He represented our community well in Springfield, and he'll be missed by many of his friends here in Tinley Park," Zabrocki said.

After his retirement, Mr. Rayson and his wife moved to Florida. He played tennis until he was 76, and enjoyed following the White Sox, Bears and Bulls, his son said.

"He called his own shots in life. He did it his way," John Rayson said.

Other survivors include five sons, William Rayson of Pembroke Pines, Fla., Anthony Rayson of Monee, Leland Rayson of Oak Forest, Thomas Rayson of Menasha, Wis., and James Rayson of Manhattan, Ill.; one daughter, Ann Bess of Hawaii; two brothers, Delwyn Rayson of Brandenton, Fla., and Glendon Rayson of Baltimore; one sister, Rohana Rattay of Chicago; 15 grandchildren; and one great-granddaughter.



Rayson

Leland H. Rayson, Illinois ex-legislator

By Teresa Lane
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

PORT ST. LUCIE — Leland H. Rayson, who served six terms in the Illinois House of Representatives before retiring to Port St. Lucie in 1988, died at a Stuart hospital Monday. He was 79.

Mr. Rayson, who met his wife of 56 years, Barbara, while undergoing Navy training in Fort Pierce, served in the Illinois Legislature from 1965 to 1977 and was most proud of his civil rights and women's rights achievements.

He sponsored bills to legalize abortion and reform what he considered Draconian drug laws, and he introduced and saw passage of the first crime victim compensation law in Illinois.

He was also an avid conservationist who introduced laws to reduce vehicle emissions and conserve water. He returned to his law practice in Tinley Park, Ill., after

leaving the state House.

Before serving at the state level, he held several local elective positions in Tinley Park, including township assessor, police magistrate and justice of the peace.

He later co-published a community newspaper covering Chicago's southwest suburbs.

He and his wife retired to Homewood, Ill., in 1977 and to Port St. Lucie in 1988, but he continued to spend summers at the family cottage in Wisconsin.

Mr. Rayson's son, John Rayson of Pompano Beach, is an attorney and former Florida legislator.

He is also survived by his wife and six other children. Services will be held at 1 p.m. Friday at the First Presbyterian Church, 1152 Midport Road.

> teresa_lane@pbpost.com

Obituary

Leland H. Rayson

Leland H. Rayson, 79, lost a hard fought battle with cancer on January 8. Ex-state Representative, a lawyer, and a person who fought for women's rights, civil rights and environmental issues, "He was truly decades before his time..." said son, Jim Rayson, of Manhattan.

Rayson, born Aug. 21, 1923 in Oak Park, is the father-in-law to Maria Rayson, a nurse at Anna McDonald School, and is the beloved grandfather to Christopher and Jimmy Rayson.

Jim Rayson, owner of Custom Carpentry and board member of the Manhattan Chamber of Commerce, said: "My dad had a profound influence on me personally, in the areas of civil rights, women's rights, environmental issues, and his over all compassion and dedication to people from all backgrounds. He truly was decades ahead of his time, and will be greatly missed by my family and those who knew him."

Rayson had a string of life-long accomplishments, starting with his enlistment into the Navy during his college years. He, like many young men during World War II, left school to serve in the armed forces. During his tour as a Junior Officer, his service included landing troops during the battle of Okinawa in the South Pacific.

While in the service, Rayson met his wife, Barbara, nee Chandler, in 1944. He remained in

Navy Reserves, but returned to college after finishing his active duty. He went on to earn his law degree from Northwestern University in 1949. The couple settled in Tinley Park, where Rayson opened a law practice, and he and Barb raised seven children

While practicing law in the southwest suburbs, Rayson also

co-published the weekly *Palos-Worth Reporter* and worked as a real estate broker. He served at times as the Bremen Township assessor, on a local school board, and as a justice of the peace.

Rayson was elected to the House in 1964 and was consistently reelected every other year until he retired 12 years later. The liberal Independent Voters of Illinois voted him Best Legislator after each term, though his success on the House floor was measured in bills he prevented from being passed, rather than in the initiatives he, himself, got enacted, said former House colleague Robert Marks.

In 1969 alone, he sponsored bills to legalize abortions, reduce the voting age to 18, require periodic reports of political campaign finances, and allow victims of violent crimes to be compensated with state funds. None passed that year.

"It kind of bothers me when you put it like that," he told a reporter at the time. "I was kidded by some friends in the House that I probably couldn't get a resolution commending Motherhood through the legislature"

Rayson and his wife retired to Port St. Lucie, Fl. in 1988. In addition to his wife, he is survived by a daughter, Ann; six sons, John, William, Anthony, Leland Harvey, Dr. Thomas and James; two brothers, Dr. Glendon and Delwyn; a sister, Rohana Rattay; 15 grandchildren; and a great-granddaughter.

A memorial service was held on Friday, Jan 12, in Port St. Lucie, during which Rayson, who retired as a Lieutenant Commander from the Navy Reserve, received full military honors for his years of service to his country.

Leland Rayson, state rep fought for liberal ideals

January 12, 2001

BY ROBERT C. HERGUTH STAFF REPORTER

During his six terms in the Illinois House of Representatives, Leland H. Rayson was regarded as an independent-minded legislator who wasn't afraid to buck the Democratic Machine as he pushed his often-controversial agenda.

He wasn't always successful in backing legislation that touched on issues ranging from gun control and abortion to workers' rights and decriminalization of marijuana. But Mr. Rayson, who was allied with other Democratic liberals such as Abner Mikva, Paul Simon and Harold Katz when he served in the General Assembly from 1965 to 1977, stayed true to his beliefs, family members said.

An Oak Park native, Mr. Rayson lived in the south suburbs until retiring to Florida in 1988. He died Monday in Stuart, Fla., of cancer. He was 79.

"He was kind of a maverick," said his son John C. Rayson, who followed his father into politics. "He was a progressive liberal Democrat, and he had kind of an odd relationship with what was then the Daley Machine.

"He had his own mind, and in many respects he was more liberal than the Machine Democrats. He'd get into trouble, but he never backed down."

Despite Mr. Rayson's differences with many colleagues, he was respected because "he was a very endearing person," Katz said.

One of Mr. Rayson's successful bills provided financial compensation for victims of crimes. He also supported, unsuccessfully, "eliminating all penalties and legalizing marijuana," Katz recalled.

Mikva noted that Mr. Rayson's legislative district, which covered south suburbs such as Tinley Park, wasn't considered a traditionally liberal area. But he was re-elected because "people appreciated his integrity and honesty, and he never tried to fool anybody about where he was coming from."

Mr. Rayson's strength left an impression on his children. Mr. Rayson brought them to march for fair housing with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in the 1960s, and Mr. Rayson also marched for civil rights in the Deep South, where he befriended attorney William Kunstler.

"He was a remarkable combination of a dedicated, hard-working liberal who was unwavering in working and fighting for what he believed, and he was totally uncorruptible," said Barbara, Mr. Rayson's wife of 56 years. "But he was also a very fun person who children and dogs adored."

As a U.S. naval officer, Mr. Rayson helped operate landing craft during World War II amphibious assaults. He retired from the U.S. Naval Reserves as a lieutenant commander. Despite his military background, he was an early opponent of the Vietnam War and traveled to Paris in the early 1970s for peace talks.

Mr. Rayson had a law degree from Northwestern University and was an avid White Sox fan.

Other survivors include a daughter, Ann Bess; sons William, Anthony, Thomas, James and Leland; two brothers; a sister; 15 grandchildren, and one great-grandchild. Services are scheduled today in Florida.



Wartime Experience Remembered

by Leland H. Rayson