

Virgil Spongberg Eulogy

By: Mark Spongberg

On December 4, 1894 Virgil Heller Spongberg was born in Preston, Idaho. He began a venture that would stand two centuries and nearly ten decades. In just a month Virgil would have been 95 years old. Grandpa Virgil was born as the child of Charles John Jr. and Evelyn Heller. There's an interesting story about Virgil's mother. It took place before Virgil was born. Shortly after Charles Jr. and Evelyn were married, which would have been in the late 1880's. She was standing at the window one afternoon waiting for her husband to come home. There was a storm approaching and she was a little nervous and concerned about her husband. And as she was standing there at the window gazing out and over the fields and farm, the house was struck by lightning and she was really hurt. Doctors from as far away as Ogden came to treat her and try to make her better, but after many months of effort she still had a number of health problems and flesh would fall from her and they were not able to understand that. Charles was in town one day, he stopped by the bank where the town folks were and everyone wanted to know how Evelyn was. He did not have any good news. A stranger who came forth and said that he would like to see Evelyn, that he thought that he could help her. And since nothing had worked Charles took him to see his wife. and he got a bottle, some kind of a clear liquid which he put on Evelyn. He came back regularly and applied this liquid and once Charles offered to pay this stranger, he said no, we'll settle up when she's well. He continued to come and she continued to improve. Well after awhile she was able to sit up in bed, the wounds were healing and she began to feel better, her strength was returning and it looked like she was going to be O.K. The stranger quit coming, never saw him again. After about a year of staying in bed, she recovered and had to learn how to walk again. She became a mother and had six children, one of which was my grandfather. Virgil was raised on a farm and when he was five or six years old, he and his older brother Lee were in the barnyard and they were playing with matches and they started a haystack on fire and their father Charles was very upset. Neighbors were coming with buckets and they were throwing buckets on the fire. His father was so mad at Virgil and his older brother Lee, every time he went past them he set down the bucket he was carrying to the fire and spanked them, then he'd go pour the water on the fire and come back, fill up the bucket and as he'd go by them again, he'd stop and swat them again. Fortunately the fire was put out, Virgil and Lee stood there crying. The fire was prevented from reaching the home. In school Virgil was a good student and he was also an athlete. I recall one experience he shared with me about a football game that he participated in. His high school team was playing a college team so it was a bit of a mismatch and the final score of that game was, if my memory is correct was 102 to 6. The six points were scored by Virgil, he fell on the opposing team, fumbled in their end zone. It was during his school years in Preston that he met Ethel, who worked at the local confectionery. Perhaps that's how grandpa Virg developed such a fondness for See's candy. They were married on January 3rd. 1918, and in March World War I was taking place and he was drafted and they moved up to Washington, was stationed at -d there. When World War I ended, he was released and moved back to Preston and in 1922 they moved to Long

when those inter emotions came forth and shone in one of these occasions at the death of his son Roland who was killed in an automobile accident. According to his sister Rea, it was a very difficult time for him and he grieved over the lose of his son. Another such occasion occurred one evening when Rea his sister had been visiting and had been looking after grandma Ethel who had been very ill, she was there taking care of her. She started going and grandpa Virgil followed her outside, put his arms around her and told her how much he loved her, how much he appreciated her. Rea was shocked, grandpa just didn't do that very often. There were those special times when he did share some of those feelings with us. My father is a lot like grandpa Virg when it comes to being somewhat silent and not showing his emotions a great deal and it was very interesting to watch those two interacting. They didn't say a lot but you could tell that there was a deep abiding trust between them. There was a confidence and a mutual respect that they communicated, it was interesting to watch. My grandpa trusted my dad to take care of almost all of his affairs and my dad honored that trust. Although Virgil lived to be 94 years old those of us who road with him in a car are quite surprised that he lasted that long. When Virgil was back behind the wheel of a car his focus was about here and you know and out this way. Anything out of that focus amnant or inamnant was not acknowledged. Craig was telling me a story last night. Grandpa had this 1965 Buick Wildcat with a 454 cu. in. engine and when you pushed on the gas peddle in that car you were moving and generally leaving behind some tire marks. And on one occasion Craig was riding with grandpa and as they pulled up to a red light next to a police car and in the middle of this red light the police car turned on his red lights and siren and takes off, he had gotten a call, he was gone. Virgil takes off with him. Craig said grandpa your going through a red light. He says I know that but you don't think this guys going to have time to pull us over do ya, and off they went. I personally recall numerous near misses. Many rides with Virg equaled the best that Disneyland and Magic Mountain have to offer as far as thrill rides go. Virgil had a guardian angle, that guy worked overtime when Virgil got behind a wheel of a car. Another thing you learned about Virgil if you were around him for awhile, he did not like to spend money. Buy and spend were not too words he used very often in his life. He used words like fix it, patch it, clean it, save it, reuse it, reshape it, rebuild it or redo it, not buy a new one.

I can remember my dads frustration at times when he wanted something new for the Mortuary and Virgil would not approve it. In later years I think my dad bought it and told him about it later. And on several of those occasions I can remember Virgil patiently telling my father how he could have fixed it, repainted it, changed it to reuse it, decorated it differently that there was no need to spend that money. He liked to work, he was always, always building something. One time he and grandma Ethel went shopping for a credenza to put their telephone on. Virg was appalled at the prices of the credenzas, this little hallway thing. So he comes back and takes out his tools and builds one, for not much. On one occasion when they needed a desk for the Mortuary Virg built the desk, the side thing, the behind thing and all he had to do was buy \$35.00 worth of formica and about \$2.00 worth of hardware, everything else he had, all the lumber he had saved. He put it together, nailed it and it was an excellent piece of furniture. In 1968 he decided that the Mortuary needed to be a little larger and decided to build an addition. Drew plans, designed it and with the help of, well I'm not sure help,

Roland and Craig and I and Jeff, we were there, we probably got in the way more than not, it was definitely an education for us. As the building was nearing completion Virg told Roland that was it, its done, I'm retiring. Seventy five years after all and he'd been building long enough and this was going to be his last project. Two weeks later he was out black topping the parking lot by hand. I remember he was probably 86 or 87 and he had some apartment buildings over on Plymouth and I was over there helping him do some work. We were putting in a concrete curb along the base of one of the walls, and I was astounded, this guy 86, 87 I'm not sure how old at that time was hauling around 60 lb. sacks of cement. He's down on his knees pouring concrete, smoothing it and pounding its footings. I remember marveling that there was no seeming effort to move up or bend over. There was no huh, you know that a lot of us do when we bend over or pull up. And then he finished that and went in the garages and started putting up petitions. He's up the ladder and down the ladder and bending over and nailing and sawing. It didn't seem to faze him a bit. I marveled at the condition that he kept himself in. Virgil was not content to be just an excellent example. He was also a great teacher, always taking the time to show you how to do something and then watch you do it and generally correct you if you weren't doing it just right. To take the brush and make sure you have the wrist action, how to saw, how to pound nails, measure things and he was always very helpful in pointing things out and very patient. One time Roland was digging a ditch and Virg told him that the key to work is thinking of what comes next. So when your finished with one task you can move right into the next task and there's no wasted effort and you don't have to stand back and spend precious time deciding what you should do next. You should be thinking and planning, you should know what your doing next. People I think were always amazed at Virgil's keen mind and sharp memory. He remembered stories and events that a lot of people forgot. About two years ago, Aunt Rea was up visiting her nephew Clay in Oregon. Clay had found some pictures, some old pictures and he showed these to Rea and he said, do you know who these three young children are. I found them in my stuff and I'm not sure who these children are. She didn't know, she didn't recognize them. But said let me take them with me and when I get back to Long Beach I'll show Virgil and we'll see if Virgil can remember. On one occasion Virgil called her and invited her to a picnic and she took those pictures along and she showed them to Virgil. And without a moments hesitation he identified all three of them. One was his brother Lee, one was his sister Leone and one was a cousin Beth, just like that. There was a time when Virgil and Rea and some of the other relatives were sitting talking about home, one thing that always bothered Rea was her name, she didn't like that name and she was upset at her parents for giving her that name Rea. She was wondering out loud in this conversation, how she got the name Rea. And Virg said I named you. Her response was something along the line, where in sam hill did you get that name. And Virg said well I remember reading about a Greek Goddess when I was in school named Rea and I thought that would be appropriate for my baby sister. In 1975 after along illness, grandma Ethel died, they had five children. When grandpa died he left behind 27 grandchildren, 38 great grandchildren and 6 great great grandchildren. In 1976 on a bus ride to San Diego grandpa Virg met Nellie, they began dating and were soon married. I've been impressed with the love that Nellie and Virg had for each other and the adventuresome spirit. It's remarkable for individuals of their age. They traveled around to different states and I think they even went to Mexico one time. One time they came to BYU

for Education Week and at that time Craig and I were attending school at BYU. They were there for a week. One afternoon they came and had lunch with us at the Cougar eat and all my friends and some of our roommates, everyone was impressed with Virgil and Nellie that they seemed to have such a love for life and a zest. We were sitting there having lunch and someone said Virg, where are you going after lunch, what are you doing this afternoon. Grandpa said well were driving up to Provo Canyon and everyone gave a chuckle a little bit because Prove Canyon was, well ya know it's a spot for couples to go to park and neck. So everyone laughed at that and I think it was Craig who said in a sarcastic tone. He said grandpa, you do know why you go up to Provo Canyon don't you. Vrig leaned over without missing a beat and said what do you think were going there for. Several months ago I heard that grandpa Virg and Nellie were moving to Idaho and I was impressed that a couple their age would be off on another adventure. There was a bit of concern among family and friends as to why they would move at their age and why they would move just as winter was approaching. Vrig is not a cold weather person, in fact I remember almost every time seeing him in his later years he either had a jacket or a sweater on, the rest of us were wearing tee shirts. So it was unusual. But he summed it up one time with a statement in public. He said Nellie wants to move to Idaho and I don't want to move to Idaho so we decided to compromise and we're moving to Idaho. In private perhaps he knew something the rest of us didn't. He told Rea one time that he thought that he might die before Nellie would get home, and it was important for her to be in Idaho, he did make fun and kidded her though. He was always thinking about that job, perhaps it was the spirit inside. He said his time was near the end. So to me it seemed like a foolish move, it was actually an inspirational move as we know. Virgil and Nellie knew what they were doing and Virgil knew that it needed to be done soon. Last Friday the movers completed unpacking their belongings and they were in their new home. On Sunday morning Virgil awoke about 4:30 am he was not feeling well. He kind of pattered around. Told Nellie, they have got to put this right there. He went back to bed and died in his sleep. It was a good ending to a story of life. The previous Sunday he spoke at a Fireside bidding farewell to his friends. On Monday night the family gathered to visit and wish them good luck in their new home. Little did we know how soon Virgil would be returning to another home and what joy he must have felt to see his wife, his daughter Marjorie who died about a month or two ago, his long lost son Roland his brothers and his sisters, his mother, his father and many others that he blessed and inspired. God be with you till we meet again; By his counsels guide up hold you; With his sheep securely fold you. God be with you till we meet again. When life's perils thick confound you; Put his arms unfailling round you. God be with you til we meet again. Till we meet at Jesus' feet. God be with you till we meet again. I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.