

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 gaping 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 teams, fumbled in their inzone.

It was during his school years in Preston that he met Ethel, who worked at the local confectionary. Perhaps that's how grandpa Virg developed such a fondness for See's candy.

They were married on January 3rd. 1918, and in March WWI was taking place and he was drafted and they moved up to Washington, was stationed at Ford there. When WWI ended, he was released and moved back to Preston and

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in 1922 they moved to Long Beach. He worked as a contractor until 1927 when he founded his Mortuary.

He was around in 1933 when the earth quake hit Long Beach and on that particular day he was visiting with Ethel and Ethel's mother Minnie at Seaside Hospital and although the hospital was badly damaged while they were there, they were able to get out of the hospital without any problems.

Back home Joyce, his daughter was babysitting the family and she had gone up to the Boulevard to buy some milk and as she was returning the earth quake struck, scared her to death, she dropped the milk, broke the bottle, ran home to find that everyone was safe. The house was damaged but everybody was O.K.

For the next two weeks they camped out in the street and slept on the ground. With the exception of Charles John Jr. grandpas dad who slept in his bed despite the risk, he was not going to sleep on the ground. The rode, you might be interested, was dirt at that time. Their nearest nighbor when they first moved in was over on Ellis, I remember grandma Ethel telling me which was maybe a half mile away so you can imagine the space in Long Beach.

Virgil was a very unique individual without a doubt one of the greatest men that we will ever know. He was the kind of man that all of us would like to be like.

His life was such an excellent balance between church, his family and the community. He was involved in many civic organizations from the American Ligion to the Y.M.C.A. He served on the board of directors of many charitable organizations. He was the President or leading member of almost every club that he joined including the Lion's Club, the Exchang Club, the Commercial Club. He was also very involved with the boy scouts and was awarded the Silver Beaver Award for his work which is the highest award that can be given on a local level.

In 1934 to 1939 and 1954 to 1963 Virgil served on the Long Beach City Council, including three years as the Vice Mayor. On July 1, 1963 the press telegram publised as editorial, it was the first time they had ever put a picture in a editorial and I'd like to read it to you at this time. It's intitiled,

"14 Years Of Distinguished Service"

"I was determined to do what I thought was right and let the chips fall where they might". With that determination Virgil Spongberg became one of the most effective man ever to serve on the Long Beach City Council. Mr. Spongberg retiring this week after 14 years of distinguish service leaves a splended example for future Coucelman and takes with him the respect and effection of an intire community. His career as Councilman has been closly inclain with the history of the city over the past three decades. He was first elected in 1934 in the middle of the depresstion when the city was a half million dollars in the red. He helped the city weather hard times. And was instrumental in bringing in the first trained city manager. After several years in private life he returned to the Council in 1954 in time to help guide the city throughthe period of its great stroke. He witnessed as increase in the population from 1050 thousand to 3054 thousand and played an important part in the lighting program in the municipal development. In those years the Council encountered a great variety of difficult problems and carried staggering responsibilitys.

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Mr. Spongberg was a strong hand on the wheel. He was quietly effective, the grandstanders, the paraders, the premodonas came and departed and he was still there. Patiently and unintrusively doing the fob that had to be done. No Councilman was better informed. He developed unequal finish in steering difficult issues through the council to its decision. He had the facility for drawing rambling minds back to the question at hand. We've heard it all now, he would say, dryly but pleasantly, now lets vote.

Thanks in a large measure to him, the vote was for the right one and in the public interest.

Mr. Spongberg now goes to a well earned retirement to devote more time to his family and his personal business affairs but it is typical of this man that he promises. "I will be willing to assume any responsibility that would be of benefit to the city I love"

For what he has done and what he offers to do, he has the lasting gratitude of his friends and neighbors, and that means all of Long Beach.

One thing about Virgil you always knew where he stood. Virgil's principals never changed, whether it was church, work or politics there was Virgil always with the same hat.

An example of this occurred in 1939, the City Council was due to vote on whether or not to continue to allow Bingo to be played at the pike. At the time Virgil was building a home for the gentleman that owned the concessions at the Pike and the Bingo game was one of them. In an attempt perhaps to influence Virgil's thinking, this gentleman indicated that if the Council did not vote in favor of Bingo that it might be difficult for him to pay Virgil for the work that he had done on his house. Virgil's response was predictable, Bingo is wrong and I'm voting against it.

My brother Creig was running for the City Council last year and one Saturday I was out knocking on doors campaigning for him. I came to this one door and explained Creig was running, would he consider voting for him. Any relation to Virgil? I said yes, he's our Grandfather. He said well I'll tell you something, I was Assistant City Engineer for many years, some 20 - 30 years ago. I saw a lot of City Councilmen come and go, Virgil was the best of the bunch. He was quite surprised to find out Virgil was still alive.

Virgil's church service is legendary, he served in numerous positions including Bishop, Stake President and Patriarch. He was ordained Bishop of the Virginia Ward in 1925 by Melvin J. Ballard. He was ordained in 1946 as Stake President of the Long Beach Stake by Harold B. Lee and he was ordained as a Patriarch in 1953 by Spencer W. Kimball. He gave nearly 2000 Patriarchal Blessings and that was a great spirituality that he possessed and as I grew older I was amazed, I was just amazed that he could go and give Patriarchal Blessings one after another, day after day, week after week. I could not comprehend how anyone could be that spiritual all the time.

Grandpa knew the scriptures better than anybody I've ever met and whenever I had to give a talk, I would pay him a visit. I'd say grandpa, I'm to give a talk on a certain subject and without looking he would immediately recite four or five scriptures that applied. Then he would share some thoughts regarding this subject and if I wrote quickly I had my talk. I generally liked to time those visits to his house during Breakfast. Breakfast with grandma Ethel and grandpa Virg was a true treat.

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With all do respect to my mother who is a phenomenal cook, something about grandma Ethel's breakfasts that were unequal, the bacon, something about that bacon, the toast and the eggs, was just, just, I don't know what, I can't tell you. I was talking to Jeff and he was saying the same thing. There was something about the food that she made that was wonderful and pies too, she was great with pies. Anyway I got to sit there and eat breakfast and listen to grandma and grandpa and I have many fond memories of that.

Virg use to say, if you don't have something good to say, don't say anything. And he'd practice that and several individual's that I've spoke with since his death have said yes, I've never heard your grandfather say a bad word. Virgil was not a man given to expressions of outer emotion and he didn't do alot of talking. Kind of quite and choose his words wisely. Preferred to demonstrate his feelings through service and unfading obedience. However there was sometimes when those inter emotions came forth and shone in one of these occations 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 grived over the lose of his son.

Another such occasion accured 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 alot 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 alot 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 honered 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 acknowlegded.

Crieg 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 accasion Crieg 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. Grieg 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 gardian 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 ofter 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.

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I can remember my dad's 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 Creig 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 that was it, its done, I'm retireing. 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 estounded, 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 seemming effort to move up or bend over. There was no huh, you know that alot 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 abit. 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 theres 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 amozed at Virgils keen mind and sharp memory. He remembered stories and events that alot of people forgot. About two years ago, Aunt Rea was up visiting her nephew Clay in Oregon. Clay had found some picktures, some old picktures 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

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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 outloud 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 Nelly, they began dating and were soon married. I've been impressed with the love that Nelly and Virg had for each other and the adventuresome spirt. 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 Grieg and I were attending school at BYU. They were there for a week. One afternoon they came and had lunch with us at the Cougaree and all my friends and some of our roommates, everyone was impressed with Virgil and Nelly 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 Canjon and everyone gave a chukel a little bit because Prove Canjon 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 Creig who said in a sarcastic tone. He said grandpa, you do know why you go up to Provo Canjon 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 Nelly 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 wareing tee shirts. So it was unusual. But he somed it up one time with a statement in public. He said Nelly wants to move to Idaho and I don't want to move to Idaho so we decided to compremise and we're moving to Idaho.

In private prehaps he knew something the rest of us didn't. He told Rea one time that he thought that he might die before Nelly 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, prehaps 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 Nelly 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 A.M.

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he was not feeling well. He kind of puddred around. Told Nelly, 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 unfailing 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.