

Letter to the Reader

Growing up, I didn't really know any of my relatives outside my immediate family. When I asked my parents about our extended family, my mother would often tell me stories about her father. So as I grew up, I came to admire this man that I didn't really meet until I was in middle school. By then he was a sarcastic and kind old man who was obsessed over his garden. At first I was a little disappointed, but as I got to know him, that admiration began to return. In the last couple years of his life, we visited often and grew close. Unfortunately towards the end he developed Alzheimer's and in turn his health took a nose dive, until he passed away less than a year later.

Before I conducted these interviews, I didn't know much on my grandfather beside his later military career and the last few years of his life. I wanted to learn about his early life, how my grandparents met, and the beginning of his military career. However, what I learned has complexed my view of him. There are things I learned about him that made me respect him greatly and other things I wish could have been different. As you read this I hope you not only enjoy this brief summary of his early life, but also grow to respect his accomplishments and learn to understand his faults. Thank you.

Over the span of his life my grandfather, Wilfred Benson Mack, accomplished things and traveled to places that most people only dream of. He served his country for over forty years as both an aviator and a minister. He traveled to places like Italy, Taiwan, and Japan. He personally prayed with many of the Astronauts of the Apollo missions, including Apollo 11, before they launched. Yet for all his accomplishments he still had faults. He gave so much of himself to help

others that in the end he wound up hurting the people closest to him; his family. He was indeed a great man, but he was not all that great of a father figure.

Ben was born the second child of Wilfred and Elisha Mack, on August 17, 1929. His older sister Dorothy was four at the time and didn't quite like the idea of having a sibling. According to her nephew, Robert Mack, Dorothy was a very independent child growing up, but she would pine for her parent's attention any time she saw them taking care of Ben. As she grew older, she realized how childish that was and came to love her brother very much.

Ben's parents had interesting professions. His father Wilfred was a botanist, a jeweler, and a landscaper; while his mother Elisha ran an afterschool Christian daycare. On top of that, they also were both strong Methodists as well. This became a problem later on in Ben's life when he converted and became a Presbyterian minister. After learning what his son had done, Wilfred refused to talk to Ben for years. In time though, they were able to patch things up.

Rewinding back to his early years, Ben spent the first seventeen years of his life in Pacific Grove, California. What's interesting about Pacific Grove is that the Mack family had owned the block and all the land surrounding it for multiple generations. Unfortunately, the family no longer owns Pacific Grove.

Ben graduated from Pacific Grove High in 1948. He then joined the Navy Reserves and got accepted into Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois. While he attended college, Ben was in both the school's football and basketball teams. From college, Ben went directly to the Navy and became an aviator. His first station was in Rhode Island, followed by North Island back in California two years later.

It was while Ben was stationed in North Island that he met his first wife Barbara Goodwin. Upon asking her how the two had met, she went into great detail as if she was reliving the scene from fifty-nine years ago.

She began by saying that they met on a cool summer Sunday in 1954. He was a new face at her church, so he caught her eye from across the room. After a while he noticed her occasional glances. He smiled at her and she remembered turning bright red from blushing. When it was finally time for the church's service, he stood up and got in line next to her. Ever the gentleman he quietly introduced himself, she smiled in return and told him her name. She said she hadn't been to church in a while, but whether by divine intervention or dumb luck she had decide to go that day. In hushed whispers, they talked and laughed with each other. After the service, he approached her and asked if she would be at the Youth Group that night. She told him she would. Though she didn't tell him until years later, it was the first time she had gone.

After that day, Ben would take a fiery on the weekends from North Island to San Diego to visit and go on dates with Barbara. They dated for two years before they got married and had their first son, Robert Mack. Shortly after, however, Ben got new orders and was stationed overseas aboard aircraft carrier, the U.S. Boxer. During this time, Barbara stayed with her parents for both financial and emotional support. Two years later they had their second son Theodore Mack, followed up by their only daughter, Lorraine Katherine Mack, four years afterwards.

After the birth of his daughter Lori, Ben decided to leave the Navy when he was the rank of Captain to become a minister. Little did he know that he would reinstate in the Navy as a minister and therapist a few years later. He was accepted back at the cost of being demoted not

one, but two ranks lower than his previous rank of Captain. A cool side note is that he was also the first minister to ever have flight wings; a medal given exceptional pilots for their service.

When he was reinstated, the Navy assigned him aboard the aircraft carrier, the U.S. Midway. As a Navy minister, he once again was stationed overseas. This time, however, his family moved along with him on his less dangerous assignments. My mother said she remembers her family moving to places like Rhode Island, Taiwan, and Italy. As a minister and therapist to the troops, Ben spend a majority of his time at work. When he was home, he usually wanted to spend his time resting or relaxing. On the other hand though, there were many times as the years went by that Ben couldn't take his family with him and would be gone for years at a time. He of course checked in on them from time to time, but his repeated absence began to create issue within his family.

Having to raise three children on her own for many years became really difficult for Barbara to the point that she developed multiple health issues as a result. From serious issues like depression and anxiety to more minor things like chronic migraines and insomnia. On top of that, due to the repeated absence of a father figure, my Uncle Robert felt that it was his duty to fill his father's shoes when Ben was away overseas. This created a sort of superiority complex in him and put a constant stain on not only his mother, but also on the relationships with his brother and sister growing up. Which in turned caused more problems.

Whereas Robert would constantly try to take charge and lecture his sibling, Teddy would constantly rebel and get into trouble. Both my mother and grandmother think he did this as a way to get attention from his father, Ben. Sadly, this horrible habit he developed stayed with him as he got older and ended up ruining the rest of his life in the years to come. Lastly, my mother did her best to constantly be away from home.

When her father wasn't there, it was just easier for her to be out with friend or busy on errands than it was to be around her family. Ben didn't intend for any of this to happen, but it was an unfortunate result of his constant travel and being stationed away from his family. Ben was a great man, but he was not all that great of a father figure. Not because he ignored or abused his family, but because he of his career constantly took him away from them.