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Hubbard Made Children, Families His Life

*Probation Counselor,
School Board Member,
Musician Remembered*

BY DOUG CHASE

Nineteenth-century American philosopher and psychologist William James once mused, "The greatest use of life is to spend it on something that will outlast it."

The recent testimony of many who knew Natural Bridge native Rodney Hubbard, who died last Wednesday at

61, leaves no doubt that his life in all its many facets will far outlast his departure.

Longtime friend and neighbor Roy Gray said of this devoted family man, who leaves his wife, five sons, his mother, three siblings nine grandchildren, 12 nephews and seven nieces: "He didn't just love his own family. He loved my family. He loved any family he encountered. There were times I wondered just how so much unconditional love could come from one man."

Gray, who also knew Hubbard well through his many years as a school administrator and during Hubbard's service on Rockbridge County School Board (1989-1995), continued, "He loved

everything about the Natural Bridge-Glasgow community, even the things that are hard to love. He was the man to whom anyone could go when they needed guidance or advice. He had an uncanny ability to make other people feel like their decisions came from them. He would just smile and move on to the next situation.

"I don't know that I ever saw him angry. He could say more in a few words than anyone I've ever known," said Gray.

Hubbard's career path was established three months after he graduated from Washington and Lee in 1974 when

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RODNEY HUBBARD

Hubbard

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he began his career as an institutional rehabilitation counselor with the Virginia Department of Welfare and Institutions, now the Department of Juvenile Justice, at the Natural Bridge Learning Center. For seven months shy of four decades, he held a number of stations with the department, including intake officer/mediator, probation counselor and probation supervisor and for the final 15 years of his career, he served as the director of Juvenile Court Service in Roanoke.

There is a nary a negative word to be heard about his career journey.

Lexington attorney David Natkin said of Hubbard, "Rodney Hubbard was one of the finest people I've ever known; he was a kind man with a tough job. He dealt with many troubled families and youths, yet he remained always fully compassionate with each and everyone.

"I think I can speak for the local legal community on this issue. Rodney Hubbard is universally regarded as the best public servant any of us has ever known."

Proving again that Hubbard's life was spent "on something that will outlast it" is the voluminous testimony of those who worked with him and for him.

"Rodney was my mentor and an influence on my life from the day I graduated from high school through every promotion I received," said Tim Turner of Glasgow, who retired as assistant superintendent of the Natural Bridge Learning Center when the facility was closed several years ago.

"He was a straightforward kind of guy" when dealing with troubled youth, Turner said. "He never sugar-coated anything. He'd look at the young men at the Learning Center straight in the eye and told them they'd reached that time in their lives when they had to say 'no' to negative peer pressure.

"I once told his son. '[T]hanks for sharing your father with a lot of young men, including me.' He always had time to listen to anyone. There are not too many people like that."

Buena Vista native Beth Mohler Stinnett, now residing in Glen Allen, was mentored by Hubbard, first as an intern and later as her first supervisor. "He was a special person in so many ways.

"He was such an intelligent and passionate man and had both the head and heart to work with system-involved children and their families. ... Rodney led by example and taught [us] that all families are worthy of our best efforts, children make mistakes and are not yet who they will become, and children are capable of change."

"He was always ready to advocate for appropriate services to assist youth while at the same time steadfast in holding youth accountable for making use of the opportunities afforded them," said Chuck Watts, who worked side-by-side with Hubbard for 14 years of their 28-year friendship.

Echoing attorney Natkin's observations, Watts added, "Rodney was well-respected by judges, attorneys and other agency staff with whom he interacted as well as the parents and youth he worked to serve."

Hubbard was also a skilled musician, who sang and played at many weddings and funerals and enjoyed years playing alongside his friends in the band Charisma.

"If you could hum him a bar or two of any song," said longtime friend Harry Stone, "he'd sit down at the piano and play it. It's difficult to come up with anything he couldn't do well."

Stone laughed. "Well, there's one: he was a lousy golfer," as were the other three members of the "The Old Guys" Gray, Stone and Scott Hannah. The foursome gathered occasionally for road trips to Myrtle Beach courses and day trips to closer links.

"We had a great time being lousy at golf," said Stone. "We didn't do the things that a lot of people away from home did. We just enjoyed laughing, talking and admitting that we really didn't know all that much."

Hannah recalled that Hubbard "was the same guy all of the time. He did so much without any fanfare. His involvement in the community, his involvement in anything he did was always low-key. There was no drama with Rodney. He just did it."

The late legendary Natural Bridge High School basketball coach George Warren was a persuasive man.

Gray recalls, "George talked Rodney into keeping the Natural Bridge scorebook, which is a tough job. I got the easier job; I ran the clock and the scoreboard.

"It was so much fun to sit beside Rodney during so many great games. I always thought he was one of the smartest guys I ever met; he could carry on a low-level conversation and keep that book.

"Then one day I looked over his shoulder and was stunned to discover that he kept the scorebook in ink; I'd never seen that before nor have I seen it since," said Gray with a catch in his voice.

Keeping a basketball scoreboard with ink seems like just the kind of thing that would be done by a man who a living example of James's wise words.

"The greatest use of life is to spend it on something that will outlast it."

Obituaries



RODNEY HUBBARD

Rodney Hubbard, 61, of Natural Bridge, passed away on Jan. 29, 2014.

Left to honor and cherish his memory is his lifelong love and wife of 36 years, Debbie; five adult sons, Scott, Korey, Rob, Aaron and Ryan (Cheri); five granddaughters, and four grandsons; his mother, Nadine C. Hubbard; and siblings Robert D. (Juanita), Reginald (Cindy) and Rita (Michael, deceased); 12 nephews, seven nieces and a host of special cousins, relatives and friends.

He was preceded in death by his father, Robert E. Hubbard.

A native of Natural Bridge, Rodney was a graduate of Natural Bridge High School and a graduate of Washington and Lee University, where he earned a bachelor of arts degree. He began his career as an institutional rehabilitation counselor with the Virginia Department of Welfare and Institutions (now the Department of Juvenile Justice) in September 1974 at the Natural Bridge Learning Center. Over the following 39 and one-half years he held a number of different positions with the department, including intake officer/mediator, probation counselor and probation supervisor with the 25th District Court Service Unit (Lexington, Covington, Botetourt). For the past 15 years he served as the director of Juvenile Court Services in the city of Roanoke (23A Court Service Unit).

Throughout his career Rodney was an active member of the Virginia Juvenile Justice Association (VJJA) and was a former member of the VJJA board of directors. He received VJJA's 1988 Meritorious Award in the Area of Court Services. Fifteen years later, he was honored a second time when he received VJJA's 2003 Meritorious Award in the Area of Administration. In November 2006 Rodney introduced the opening speaker at VJJA's 30th Fall Institute. It was the first VJJA event he attended following his successful heart transplant and recovery.

Rodney served on the advisory board for BB&T Bank. He served on the initial board of the Rockbridge Area Recreation Organization, the Project Horizon board and the Chavis House board for Washington and Lee University. He also was a former member and chair of the Rockbridge County School Board.

He was a lifelong member of the First Baptist Church of Natural Bridge, 19 Peacekeeper Lane, Glasgow, VA 24555, where he served in numerous capacities and participated in the music ministry for more than 50 years.

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Rodney was a special person - a devoted husband, a loving son, a wonderful father, a caring brother and uncle, a good friend - an extraordinary man. He had a special gift of molding and shaping young minds and hearts and growing healthy and productive citizens. He touched many lives. He was patient, supportive, stern and kind. He will be lovingly remembered for his soft spoken, direct, no

nonsense approach to life and his wise counsel both at home and in the community.

A visitation will be held on Friday, Feb. 7, from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Harrison Funeral Home. A service celebrating his life will be held on Saturday, Feb. 8, at the First Baptist Church of Lexington, 103 N. Main St., at 11 a.m., followed by a private family burial.

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