



Robert Emerson Hennessee

August 13, 1929 - November 18, 2021

Robert Emerson Hennessee, 92, of Maitland, FL passed away November 18th at AdventHealth Hospital Orlando following a sudden illness. Born in Burnsville, North Carolina on August 13, 1929, he was the youngest of three children born to Ruby Anderson and William Wren Hennessee.

A natural athlete with a particular talent for baseball, in his senior year of high school he was scouted by the Brooklyn Dodgers, who offered him a place on their Triple-A team. He turned it down. Had he accepted, he would have filled the opening vacated by Jackie Robinson, who was moving up to the major league.

He instead attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he reported and wrote editorials for the college newspaper, the Daily Tar Heel. His senior year he ran for the North Carolina State Senate on the Democratic ticket. He was well on his way to beating his Republican opponent when a reporter discovered that at 21, he was too young to legally run, a fact which had not previously occurred to him or to his opponent. Despite this, with his name already printed on the ballot, the election was close, and he captured 45% of the vote. He graduated with a B.A. in journalism in 1951.

In 1952, he moved to New York City and was hired as an assistant reporter at the New York Post. He was particularly proud of contributing to a series of

columns opposing Walter Winchell, the syndicated gossip columnist who had aligned himself with Joe McCarthy.

He served in the U.S. Army in Germany from 1954 to 1956, first as a cryptographer, and then as an editor of the Seventh U.S. Army Sentinel newspaper.

In 1956, he joined the International News Service in Chicago as a reporter. In 1957 he was sent to Little Rock, Arkansas to cover the story of the Little Rock Nine, the nine black students who integrated the city's all-white Central High School after the Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court decision. There he sought out Daisy Bates, the state NAACP President and architect of the integration plan, and was the only reporter she invited into her living room as she counselled and prepared the students in the days before they entered the school. The stories he filed were lauded by newspaper editors – "That's the best I've seen out of Little Rock." "That's about the best yarn I've seen come off your wire since I've been wire editor here." "We were especially pleased with Robert Hennessee's story from Little Rock." "We could use more of his copy."

An editorial he wrote for an Illinois newspaper in 1960 endorsing John F. Kennedy for president was widely disseminated by the Kennedy campaign throughout Illinois, and after the election, Kennedy's advisor Ted Sorenson joked to him that the editorial had won Kennedy the state of Illinois, and therefore the presidency. After the inauguration, Kennedy posed with him for a photo as a thank-you.

After brief stints at the Washington Star and Tufty News Service, in 1961 he became publisher of Globe Newspapers, a string of 12 weekly suburban newspapers in northern Virginia and Maryland. In the early 1970's he founded Daisy Tells, an advertising business, and launched The Billboard newspaper

in Montgomery County, Maryland. After relocating to central Florida in 1979, he founded a goods-exchange business called The Barter Club. He eventually returned to publishing, creating two business-oriented newspapers, Business to Business, and New Business Today. In 2013, he invented an alternative currency system for businesses.

He met and connected with many prominent people during his long life, and loved to tell the stories. As a child in 1937 he crept downstairs late one night, and was introduced to the novelist Thomas Wolfe, who was sitting cross-legged on the living room floor, poring over a rare copy of the 1790 North Carolina Census kept in the house. As a young reporter, he once called the White House close to midnight because he needed a quote from Harry Truman for the morning papers. He was put right through and woke up Truman, who gave him his quote. On leave from the army, he recognized William Faulkner at an outdoor café in Rome and introduced himself. They discussed the meaning behind Faulkner's latest novel, A Fable, which he had just read. One evening in 1960, he arrived home with Oliver Tambo, the exiled South African anti-apartheid activist and future African National Congress president, who needed a place to stay.

He was attracted to intellectuals and they to him. Close friends included the scholar and civil rights activist Al Lowenstein, and New Deal architect Benjamin Cohen, with whom he frequently played tennis, even on icy winter days.

He followed politics closely, and was a passionate sports fan, with a particular soft spot for UNC's basketball team. He had a powerful and creative intellect, an unusually sharp memory and breadth of knowledge, and above all loved to exchange ideas. He was a marvellous storyteller. He will be particularly remembered for his ability to always put things in perspective, his wise

counsel, deep kindness, and great love for his family.

He was married three times: in 1957, to Judith Adler Hennessee, who survives him; in 1968, to Linda Opper Hennessee, who is deceased; and in 1989, to Alberta Branche Hennessee, who predeceased him.

He leaves behind four children: Nancy Hennessee, Joshua Hennessee (Jennifer), Jason Hennessee (Cayce), and Scott Hennessee; as well as six grandchildren -- Thomas, Charles (Charlie) and James (Jem) Costello, and Milinda, Conley and Carson Hennessee.

A memorial service will be held at a future date.

The family of Robert Emerson Hennessee invites you to leave a message of condolence on the Tribute Wall created in his memory.