

Reporting ZOOM Meeting of 15 February 2021

Calendar of Events

Last Week: 2/8 Eric Connolly, Town of Ballston Supervisor

This Week: 2/15 Ray O'Connor, *She Called Him Raymond*

Next Week: 2/22 Paddy Rooney, *A Vision with a Passion*

Coming Up: 3/1 Mark Sheehan, ARC

Note: Regular ZOOM Meetings are held Mondays at 6:00 pm.
Check your e-mail inbox the day of the meeting for the computer ZOOM ID# and Password, as well as the phone number you can use to phone in if using your cell phone to participate.

*Please give suggestions for future programs to Darlene Bower
and Dan Stec.*

Find us at bhblrotary.org and on Facebook

*Together, we see a world where people unite and take action to create
lasting change – across the globe, in our communities and in ourselves*

Ray O'Connor, *She Called Him Raymond*

This week's speaker was author Ray O'Connor who discussed his book "She Called Him Raymond." He had never set out to write the book, but after learning about the story he knew he had to write it.

The story centers around the love story of Helen Gregg and Clarence R. Stephenson during the 1940s. Clarence grew up in Ohio and Helen in Hell's kitchen, both in poor families that suffered through the Great Depression. The two met by chance in New York City's Central Park by sheer chance. Clarence had set out to join the Army Air Corp after Pearl Harbor and was visiting New York for training when he happened to stroll through the park that day in 1942. They talked and she said she would call him by his middle name Raymond.

It was love at first sight for both of them but Helen's mother forbade her to marry till she was 18, which was two years away. The two did marry two years later and soon after Clarence, now a B17 pilot headed off to the war to an airbase in England.

The two had a daughter named Anne Marie, while he was overseas. Tragically his B17 crashed with everyone on board dying except one airman. Raymond and his daughter would never get to meet. It then took 4 years for his body to be returned and for Helen to be able to give him a funeral in his hometown of Ironton, OH.

Life carried on and Helen eventually married again. This time to a Korean War Veteran 9 years later. Fast forward to Helen's 80th birthday party. Away and aside from the festivities, Helen called her son into her bedroom to talk with him. She pulled out an old letter from Clarence Raymond Stephenson. It was the last letter she had received from him before his death. Her son somewhat bewildered asked why she was telling him this now. She let him know that his name Ray was in namesake of her first love Clarence Raymond Stephenson.

Her son is Ray O'Connor, who then sought out to find out more about Raymond. At first it was out of curiosity and then as the story grew more in depth, Ray knew he had to tell the story somehow and find out more.

Ray left his job as bank CEO and focused solely on the book and his writing. He traveled to Ironton, OH to talk with Raymond's surviving family members. Raymond's sister was able to provide an old diary of Raymond that connected and gave the inner thoughts of Raymond and his love for Helen. He also found the sole survivor of the B17 plane crash and from him was given the flight data book of all the flights of Raymond.

Ray now knew he had an amazing story in his hands with tons of information but he also knew he needed to tell it perfectly. He sought out renowned author James Bradley who wrote "Flags of our Fathers" and "Flyboys." They talked numerous times and eventually James said to Ray, "Just tell the damn story." And that's just what Ray did.

The book has done very well and has even been turned into a screenplay for a possible movie. For more information about the book and Ray O'Connor please visit his website.
<http://www.shecalledhimraymond.com/>

Announcements

- Jon Costolo announced again that there are openings for Board of Directors positions for the upcoming Rotary year 2021-22. The Nominating Committee is taking nominations and also looking for others to be on the Nominating Committee itself. It is made up of 3-5 members. And finally, and most importantly, we are looking for the President Nominee for the 2021-22 Rotary year as well.

Reported by Jon Costolo