

MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR: BOB SIBLEY



Bob Sibley was born and bred as a proper Bostonian, but his Texan tablemates at the Breakfast Round Table (#37) have been working hard at making a long, tall Texan out of him. He has been on some field trips, been amused by several of the most unusual town names in the state, and has watched the complete PBS series on Sam Houston as well as reading important books on Texas history.

We are not the first state to try to win him over. After being raised by his mother and grandparents in their Orthodox Jewish home and educated in the public schools of his Boston suburb, Bob first tried his wings in New York by matriculating at New York University, where he took his Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering in 1944. It didn't take long for him to know that New York was not for him.

Going immediately after graduation into the Army's Quartermaster Corps, he was stationed at Ft. Lee, Virginia. Virginia was then a dry state and on weekends the young soldiers liked to go into DC to party, but toward the end of the month when paychecks had been exhausted they were pretty much stuck with what was within walking distance and available for free. One of the other guys in his outfit confided to Bob that the Temple had great food and entertainment for the soldiers on Saturday nights, so he decided to give it a try.

To his delight there was a magnificent spread of delicious home cooking—all the familiar foods of his childhood, so he set out to show his appreciation by eating heartily, filling his tall, slender frame (6'4") with goodies. Just as he sat down to eat he felt a tap on his shoulder and turned to see a beautiful brunette smiling at him and asking "Would you like to dance?"

With all the charm of a properly focused engineer he replied, "I want to eat first!" Her face fell and her smile faded as she vanished into the crowd, and he realized that maybe, just maybe he had been a trifle abrupt. Once he had polished off his plate of food he began looking for her, and when he spotted her he had time to observe that she was really good-looking. He approached her with some trepidation knowing that he had some fences to mend (or whatever the Boston equivalent would be.)

He asked her to dance and was pleased and a bit surprised when she accepted. They danced together the rest of the evening, while he learned that her name was Ellen and she was a native Virginian living at home with her family, all of whom were members of the Temple. That was March 12, 1945, and three months later Bob and Ellen were married in a union that lasted 63 years until her death in 2008.

The ink was hardly dry on his marriage license when the young soldier/bridegroom received Army orders for duty in Calcutta, India, where he was stationed for nearly a year. By the time his year was over WWII had ended and he went back to Virginia where he was welcomed with open arms by his bride and her family. His own family were equally

accepting of her, though he did have one uncle who had some misgivings about her kicking off her shoes at home, saying “She doesn’t wear shoes,” and of her thick Virginia drawl, “and she doesn’t speak English.”

Bob went to work in Richmond for a steel fabricating plant there, and became buddies with another engineer. They liked their work but together decided if they were going to make any real money they needed to go into business for themselves, which they did. Their wives were fully supportive even during the lean start-up years when they had to mortgage their homes as collateral to buy expensive equipment and build the business. Their diligence paid off and they built a thriving structural engineering company.

Meanwhile Bob’s life was also occupied with his family and with public service. Because one of their two daughters was severely handicapped by cerebral palsy he became very involved with the Cerebral Palsy Foundation on local, regional and national levels.

Their other daughter became a highly-placed Hewlett Packard executive and settled in Houston. It was she who found Treemont and urged her dad to move here in 2012.

Well-read and well-informed, Bob continues with a variety of interests and is a good conversationalist on any number of subjects. Although he denies any interest in most formal expressions of religion, he holds to the high standards of the Judeo-Christian ethics and family values.

He’s not quite a Texan yet but is making progress. His sense of humor was displayed recently when he “modeled” for the Treemont style show with all the hand positions and pirouettes he deemed



suitable for the occasion—bringing down the house in the process.

Bob tries a “taste of Texas” in the style show. “I’m an old cowhand, from the Rio Grande...”

But not quite yet.

One thing remains unchanged. He still “pahks the cah in the fah paht of the cah pahk.” Just kidding, Bob. Relatively few of our

residents even have “cahs”, so pronunciation is a moot point. And we love you anyway—even if you do “talk funny!”!

