

# A Tribute to the Life of James Stephens Marshall

Delivered at the Memorial Service at  
First Presbyterian Church of Boca Raton Florida May 26, 2006  
by Rodney Marshall  
On behalf of his beloved mother and siblings

James Stephens Marshall

- A good man
- A faithful man

My last words spoken directly to my father in person were these, "Dad, I know no better man than you. Your steady example has enabled me to succeed. I hope to see you here again, but if not I will see you in heaven." To this, he responded with characteristic thumbs up. For a lifetime, Dad was faithful to the Christian Faith, to his family and to the flag.

He was faithful to the Faith. In one of my earliest memories as a child of less than five years, I recall asking, "Dad, why does that man next door wear such a funny collar?" "Well son," he replied, "that man is a holy man, a godly man. He is a priest and a servant of God." Little did I know then that twenty years later I would be ordained as a minister of the Gospel. Each Sunday all of us would dress in our nicest clothing and go to Church. When we moved from Richland, Washington to New York, as one of the first matters of importance, my parents found a church where we would faithfully attend for as many years as we lived there. Last summer after thirty some years absence I returned to New York for a reunion. On the first morning after my arrival I drove to First Presbyterian Church of Wappingers Falls and finding the door open sat down in the pew always occupied by my mother and five Marshall children. Dad, of course, was in the choir loft booming out the bass line, most of the time very close to on pitch. His choir experience began at Saint Luke's Episcopal Cathedral in Spokane where he was a soprano in the boys' choir. Every Sunday when I wanted to and when I did not want to, I recall confessing my sins and then rising to profess the Christian faith in the words of that ancient Apostles' Creed saying, "I believe in God the Father Almighty maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord ..." There in that same pew, in June 2006, I thanked God through hot tears for a father that made sure I attended a church of the orthodox Christian faith, that I was baptized and catechized and that I attended Sunday school. Later, I stepped into my Sunday school room where first I knew I believed. There my teacher taught us about the Proverbs of the Old Testament. As an assignment one morning, she us asked to write our own Proverb and I wrote, "Listen to God and remember." I still have that Proverb tucked away somewhere in a scrapbook. In addition, I still believe that when reading or listening to someone read the Bible, I should listen to and remember the very words of God. When IBM moved Dad to Florida, one of the first things he and mom did was find First Presbyterian Church of Boca Raton where they have attended since 1978. Dad sang in the choir and upon his retirement from IBM served the church by sorting the mail, collecting and delivering peanut butter for the

food bank, showing up early to open and ready the church buildings for services and by staying after the second service until all had departed to secure the campus before driving home for Sunday dinner. Even at home, Dad set the example of spirituality in many ways including gathering the family for meals beginning with prayer, the doxology or sometimes by singing, "Evening has come, the board is spread, thanks be to Him who gives us bread. Praise be to God."

James Stephens Marshall was faithful to his family. The husband of one wife, Doris, for 57 years, none of us ever wondered once about his fidelity. Yesterday while leafing through a chronologically arranged scrapbook of Dad's life my brother, sisters, and I came across the college photographs of a beautiful young woman who came to become our mother. Wow! No wonder he stayed faithful. This example of fidelity in marriage in a day of constantly broken vows should serve as our example, men, that we should also always remain faithful to our wives. With Mom, Dad fathered and raised five active children. Paula, the oldest is a dedicated mother and historic preservationist. Dianne is a faithful mother and a middle school teacher of many years experience. Janna the Voice – like Jesse the Body Ventura, Janna is trained as an operatic vocalist and is a fine mother of five children. Jeff is an entrepreneur, business and property owner in nearby Deerfield Beach. One evening mom entered the room to ask, "Jim what are you boys talking about?" "I am talking to my wayward son," he replied. "Jeff wants to leave college and fix cars." Then he turned to my brother and said, "Listen, if you are going to fix cars then own your own automobile repair business." Jeff took his advice and is successful as a business and property owner. Dad jumped in to help Jeff however he could whether pouring concrete, painting the shop or an occasional word of advice. For 15-18 years, he showed up at the shop on Tuesday and Friday to pick up and make the bank deposit before 2 pm. In everything, he exemplified his motto, "Leave it better than you found it." When breaking camp to travel home he would say, "We need to gather and stack some firewood." "Why, we are leaving," we would complain. "Because we want to leave the campsite better than we found it for the next campers," he taught. We were to pick up papers along the trail and not only when camping were to leave the world a little better place. As one of the Hammerheads at the Gumbo Limbo Environmental Complex, and as one of the Grumpy Old Men at the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, Dad left God's creation a little bit better week after week for well over a decade. "Hey, little bingo," he would boom along with his patented air-compressing clap, from the baseline fence. He was encouraging, not demanding. He was always there to bail us out. "Go get my Dad!" I screamed to my partner in mischief. There I was at about age eight; playing on one of the forbidden home construction sites around Lake Oniad when I stepped into what I was sure was quicksand. Down I sunk farther and farther with no hope of extricating myself. Well, Dad came and yanked me out leaving my waffle stompers behind. Yes, he bailed me and all my brothers and sisters out when ever we called upon him.

Jim Marshall was faithful to the flag. An Eagle Scout, Dad barricaded the doors, stocked guns and ammunition and prepared to defend his home and homeland when learning of the attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941. He sought to enlist but was not yet of age for service. Grandpa Julian later told me he took the opportunity to convince his enraged,

patriotic son, to enroll in the officer-training program and receive tuition support through the GI Bill. He did so and served as an officer in the United States Navy during the reconstruction of Japan. One day, we found a tall, tapering, six-inch caliper tree, cut it down; property stripped the limbs with a sharp hatchet – having first tightened tapped the wedges tightly in the head – to erect our flagpole out by the big rock in the juniper bed. We attached a brass pulley to the top and a brass pulley within a boys reach near the bottom. We took out a fresh length of nylon line, melted with ends with his stainless cigarette lighter (oops – that is a problem), attached hardware and slipped the clasp to the top and bottom grommets on the bright 3' x 5' Stars and Stripes and up went the colors. “Now, Rod or more likely Roddy – you know how it works I went from Roddy to Rod and now a proper Rodney – you need to lower that flag at sundown, use the triangular fold and never let it touch the ground,” he instructed reverently. Down came the colors, and he showed me once how to fold the flag. Then, it was my turn to fold it lengthwise in thirds, and hand over hand beginning with the stripes fold it down to a flat, taut triangle with nothing but the field of blue and bright white stars showing at the end of the fold. It took several tries but when finally no red or white showed, we stowed the flag in a special spot until the next morning. Twenty years later, my oldest son Jess and I found a white metal pole, attached pulleys at the top and bottom, took out a fresh length of white nylon rope, melted the ends, attached the hardware, planted the pole and attached the flag and raised a 3' x 5' gleaming flag of the United States of America. “Now, Jess, at sundown lower the colors without allowing the flag to touch the ground and fold it like this,” I instructed my oldest son before he was old enough for Boy Scouts. I beamed with fatherly pride as Jess snapped the flag in thirds and folded it up into a blue triangle with gleaming white stars and no red showing. “Dad, what are you writing on that long yellow legal pad,” I queried some years after learning to be an American. “I am expressing my concern about the right to keep and bear arms to my duly elected Senator. He represents me in the U.S. Congress and I want to make sure takes my thoughts into consideration.” In my next letter to my Congressman, I will advocate the importance of a business environment free from excessive government control.” “Young man, I am proud of you for standing your ground with your coach on the hair length issue,” said Guy Riggs, Libertarian candidate for the state assembly of New York, who my father was supporting in the early 70s. “Well, thank you. I just told my baseball coach I did not see why I should cut my hair just because he wanted me to since it did not affect my MVP play.” No wonder the members of the Marshall tribe have always expressed our independent opinions on the issues. Yes, my Dad was reverently faithful to the flag.

What more could be said of a life of a life lived well by example. We could include thoughts about birds and blooms since every one of us is a birder to a greater or lesser extent and each one of us values the beauty of a rose or orchid garden because of Dad's love for these things. We could talk about The Kiplinger Letter since Dad read each issue carefully as he stewarded the assets in his charge so mom would be well cared for later in life. We could joke about his funny ties and his favorite shirts and I suppose we could fill pages with words about his good deeds.

Let me close with the prayer he so often prayed at meals when we did not sing saying, “This is the day that the Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it. Thank you

father for the food that is before us, both for its quality and for its quantity. Help us become better citizens of your world and ours and help make this world a little better place. In Jesus name, Amen.” Amen Dad. Breathe easy where you are and we will see you in the resurrection!