



NTEU CHAPTER 49

REMEMBERS GEORGE BILQUE

I never really knew George Bilque (I became involved with NTEU after his retirement), but I truly appreciate what he has built. Many of our current chapter leaders learned their craft under George and their expertise is a testimony to his influence and leadership. The purpose of this publication is to honor George by having people who knew him well write about their experiences with him. At the end of this newsletter, we will tell you how you can do something special in George's memory.

Duncan Giles, Current President NTEU Chapter 49

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I am very distressed to hear about the death of George Bilque. I really liked George and enjoyed working with him. He was a very nice man who demanded, and received, respect. He was not afraid to state his opinion, no matter who he upset! I worked on a union problem in the South Bend office that was coordinated between George and management. He was very protective in dealing with this problem, and it was then that I realized that he would protect all of his union stewards -- no matter what. With George you felt safe as well as open to speak your mind. While I know he was ready to leave the Service, it was a large loss when he left.

Vivian Burton, NTEU Chapter 49 Steward

I am deeply saddened by the news of George Bilque's passing.

I once had the opportunity to spend several weeks with George when we were negotiating one of the National NORD agreements in Washington.

I will never forget the time when we were riding in the hotel elevator and George said: "Wait. This is Mahler's 10th Symphony." He was referring to the elevator music. I was really impressed. George was a fountain of information.

When George retired I lost contact with him. Please extend my condolences to his friends in Chapter 49.

Mike Peacher, NTEU National Vice President Chicago

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Obviously, most of my involvement with George centered around his tenure as Chapter President. I doubt how many people can actually say they knew George well or that they knew him personally, for George was a very private man. However, those of us here in Indiana owe him a great deal of gratitude for his arduous efforts in being Chapter President. George had a "determined demeanor" when it came to negotiating with management. His tireless work on the Partnership Council and the framing of the Agreement regarding same established inroads which are still in place today. His drafting of the Flexi place and Credit Hour Agreements are still in force and effect today some eight years later. The drafting of the National NTEU Agreement has some of the very features George innovated in our local agreement.

George A. Bilque Junior 1946-2004

But George's impact on the local chapter goes well beyond his chairing and drafting of living documents. George demanded that his stewards embodied a uniform approach in protecting employee rights. George was emphatic about the fact that a Chapter is only as strong as its stewards. To that end, I can remember having week long training when George would actually lecture 8 hours a day for days on Contractual Provisions. Why? Because he believed stewards had to know them the way they were written and why they were written to effectively protect employees' rights.

But there was much more to the guy everyone called George. George never stopped being an estate tax attorney and defending the Treasury of the United States Government. Even though the job of Union president consumed countless hours of his time, he carried as big a workload as an estate tax attorney as anyone else in his group. But when George wasn't preoccupied with work or the Union, he loved to talk about books he was reading or trips he was planning to take.

Although the physical presence of George is no longer with us, his impact on this Chapter and those of us that knew him will continue to effect how we conduct the business of protecting employees' rights.

Brian Kosteck, Chapter 49 Chief Steward

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A Farewell Letter to George

Dear George,

I was asked to contribute my thoughts about my experiences with you over the years. It's still too painful to think or talk of your death so I decided to write you a letter in the present tense.

I'd like to thank you for appointing me as a steward in 1984. You must have seen something in me that I didn't at the time because I was opinionated, quite feisty and spoke my mind without the slightest concern of how it sounded.

National NTEU training was in Indianapolis that following year and all of your stewards were required to attend. Remember I was late for the first session? My first real encounter with you face to face was you chewing me out for being late. Lesson learned: No excuse is good enough for missing training.

I remember one of those nights when you and all the stewards getting together to hash over the day. Was it manhattans or martinis you liked so well? Whatever it was, you indulged yourself as we all did and I began to see the reason everyone was in awe of you as our leader. I'd never seen anyone (nor have I since) get that passionate talking about our work as stewards, airing your opinions about management and creating a unity in that room I'll never forget.

I can see you now waving your arms, your voice cracking because you would get so emotional when you spoke. I remember asking myself 'what have I gotten myself into?' Lesson learned: Show your passion about what you believe in.

As the day, weeks and years passed, I tried to emulate you in all I did as a steward. I listened to every word you spoke amazed at how your dedication, enthusiasm and energy remained constant. As I began to be assigned more and more union work, you and I spoke daily, sometimes several times a day. I never once felt I was interrupting or that you didn't have time for me. As I look back now, I probably did cling to you a bit more than I should have but you just let me grow at my own speed and learning from my mistakes. Lesson learned: When someone is working hard, appreciate what they do and allow for mistakes.

Thanks for taking me out for my birthday that one-year when we were at training. Best steak I ever had. Thanks for coming to my side the time Inspection came to see me. Thanks for staying by my side until it was over. Thanks for trusting me and valuing me as a person. Thanks for being my friend and my mentor.

I remember at your retirement reception I cried when I hugged you goodbye and told you I'd miss you. And you, of course, just smiled and said you'd miss me too. Being the private person you are, I had a feeling we might not see each other again. But you knew how much I cared for you and I knew you cared for me too. I feel very blessed to have had you for a friend, George. You taught me well.

I became a stronger and wiser person because of all you taught me. You always put other people ahead of yourself as every outstanding leader always does.

I enjoyed being able to write you and share my thoughts. It helps me say goodbye to you one more time. I love you George and I pray that you are at peace and tending to your orchids without anymore interruptions.

Karen

Karen McKibben, Former Chief Steward, now retired

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I served as vice president of Chapter 49 for about three years, which included the final three years of the George Bilque era as president of this NTEU chapter. When I think of George Bilque I think of two things – excellence and caring.

George Bilque graduated from the University of Michigan Law School, one of the most renowned schools of law in the world. George had many opportunities before him, yet he chose government service as a career. And George served the government very well during his IRS tenure as one of the Service's most respected Estate and Gift Attorneys. When George became active with NTEU, again he chose to serve, this time volunteering to help his fellow IRS workers.

I cannot count the number of lives George touched during his time as Chapter 49 president. I do not know the number of people he helped with a problem. But I know the number is large.

George Bilque was nobody's fool. He had no patience for management officials who made statements he knew to be just plain wrong. But George also had no patience for others. When he saw a national union attorney incompetently handle an arbitration hearing, George ordered the attorney out of the hearing room and George handled the proceedings from there. He did that because he was concerned the employee was not getting the best representation possible. George had a temper, no doubt about that, but his anger was normally reserved for those he saw harming his union members.

George never forgot who elected him and always made every decision with the members of Chapter 49 in mind. George battled not only management officials, but he also had some famous skirmishes with national union officials when he thought they were meddling in the local chapter's affairs. But all that was tied to the intense loyalty George felt to the members that had voted him into office. To George, democracy was one of the greatest strengths the union possessed as an institution.

At one NTEU national convention, George encountered a long-time national vice president that was about to lose her position due to some internal union political moves. As she started to talk with George about it on the convention floor, the woman burst into tears. George put his arms around her and comforted her. That's a side of George Bilque few people ever saw.

I learned many things from George Bilque serving with him in a leadership position. I learned that IRS has good and bad management officials. George believed NTEU should work with the good managers to solve problems and use our legal rights as a union when bad managers damaged the interests of their own employees. George began as chapter president during a time NTEU and management were constantly involved in pitched battles. When the Service moved toward a partnership relationship with the union, George was willing to partner with management successfully to solve a number of problems.

George Bilque's passing is a great personal loss for me. I respected him and had a great personal affection toward him. NTEU is the institution it is today because people like George Bilque paved the way. I am sad that he is gone. But his legacy will be with us for a long, long time.

Larry Lannan, Communications, Chapter 49

George Bilque

When I heard the name at the time of his death, it brought back several memories.....

George is someone who helped shape my career with the IRS. In 1988, I became a Revenue Officer, a steward for NTEU Chapter 49 and met George Bilque.

At my first steward training, I called him Mr. Bilque and he quickly let me know that "his stewards" were "his friends" and I was to call him George. When I say that he shaped my career that's because he offered me several opportunities for training through NTEU that I feel I would never have been offered by the IRS. I eventually became Vice President of Chapter 49 and feel that is a direct result of the good things that I saw George do for his fellow employees. There are a couple of phrases that I remember George saying. One of the things that I remember him saying was "they can't do that". This was said about many things managers did or said that they were going to do. The other phrase was "I can find one good thing to say about every employee". This was said at the last steward training that George attended before his retirement. He wanted to remind us that every employee deserves the best representation that we can offer to them. I have repeated that line to stewards at training many times since.

I asked George about his retirement plans and he stated that he had hundreds of books to read and records to listen to.

Well, George my friend, I hope that you enjoyed all those books and records. You will be missed.

Susan Wright, Current Chapter 49 Vice President

George Bilque had not been in contact with his family for roughly 20 years. We don't know why. George's family seems genuinely interested about what George had been doing during his years as chapter president. We ask that any of you with stories or comments to make about George and his work as Chapter 49 president send us your stories in writing. You may e-mail them to LALANNAN@HOTMAIL.COM. If e-mail isn't for you, mail your written stories or comments about George Bilque to – George Bilque Remembered, PO Box 44181, Indianapolis, Indiana 46204. We will forward your comments to George's family. It's one last thing we can do for George to let his family know how important he was to all of us.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Indiana University Foundation.

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