

Tribute to Bob Johns
Presented February 6, 2006
Diane Gordon

Bob was born and raised in Minerva, Ohio which is about 15 miles East of Canton. His parents were Frank and Isabella Johns and he was the oldest of three children in the family.

Bob attended Minerva High School. If you ask Bob if he likes roller skating rinks, you'll definitely get a yes. That is where he met his lovely wife, Lillian. Lillian was a junior at Alliance High School and of course, Bob attended Minerva. Bob recalls the fond memories of skating and also Tuesday night dances because he enjoyed seeing Lillian on these special nights. Bob graduated from Minerva High School in 1939 and later married Lillian in May, 1941, after dating for three years.

After graduating from high school, Bob could not financially afford to attend college so he worked at Hercules Motor in Canton, Ohio, for two years. He then decided to enlist in the Air Force as a Bombardier Cadet. However, Bob ran into a small problem when he showed up to take his exams for the Air Force. He passed everything with flying colors, except the weight limit. He had to lose 20 pounds in 30 days in order to be accepted. After 30 days, he reported to the Air Force and had lost 22 pounds. So, Bob was now going to become a Bombardier Cadet. Prior to this time, most Bombardier Cadets were required to have 2 years of college. Times had changed and they were now admitting young men and allowing them to study while serving in the Air Force. Bob served his basic training in Biloxi, Mississippi. He then went to Oswego, NY for five months. During this time, he took lots of math and physics courses. However, the class that Bob remembers most was Physical Education because they sometimes got to swim in Lake Ontario during the months of March and April. Doesn't that sound like fun? He then went to Maxwell Field in Alabama which was the Air Force version of West Point. Their motto was "to be made gentlemen and officers." While at Maxwell Field, President Roosevelt was scheduled to visit and they practiced twice a day so that they would be "perfect" when the President arrived. They were most excited because "about a dozen of the best cadets" would get to shake hands with the President. Unfortunately, this was his one and only opportunity to shake a President's hand and Roosevelt had to cancel his

visit because of illness. He then spent time in Carlsbad, New Mexico. He graduated from Bombardier School in 1944. After graduation, he became a Bombardier Instructor and trained Chinese Cadets. Bob then went to Ft. Myers, FL for a couple of months and was training to go on a mission leaving out of Kansas City. This would be a very important and dangerous mission. There would be 10 personnel on the plane with many guns to protect them from an air attack. Then, good news arrived! The war was over and this mission would not be necessary! About a month later, he was discharged.

When Bob returned home in 1945, he enrolled at Mt. Union College. He was now eligible for educational benefits under the GI Bill and he also worked part-time. He was planning to study physical education, dentistry, or engineering. His decision was easy when after three semesters at Mt. Union, he had enough credits to enter Dental School. Ohio State had 800 applicants for Dental School and they were accepting 80 students. Now, at this point, Bob had a successful career in the Air Force and had done very well at Mt. Union. But, being the modest person that he is, he really thinks that he was accepted to Ohio State because of a mistaken identity. The Admissions Director saw him in the office waiting room and welcomed him with "Hello Milton." Not knowing who Milton was, he told her that he was Bob Johns. She was most embarrassed because he was not Milton Caniff who was a famous cartoonist and alumnae of Ohio State. Nevertheless, he was elated that he was accepted into the Dental program. He was now 27 years old and starting dental school. There were 80 students in the dental program and interestingly enough, 78 of them were veterans.

While at Ohio State, Bob & Lillian lived in an apartment on campus. However, this first year was difficult for them because students could not have children in university housing. They wanted Claudia with them so after one year, they were so happy to be able to buy a home (granted, it needed some work but it cost only \$60/month). They shared this home and the cost with another couple who lived upstairs. Lillian worked while he was in school. After four years of school, they sold the house to their friends that lived upstairs and they were able to pay off the balance of Bob's education loans. Bob was so thankful and appreciative for the GI Bill giving him the opportunity to complete his education.

Upon graduation in 1950, they visited Wooster, Ohio, where Dr. Heinbaugh was closing his practice. After 2 years of practice in Wooster, Bob then went to Orthodontic School for two years.

The Johns' have now made Wooster their home for over 50 years. They have four children. Claudia teaches Dental Hygiene at a Community College in Virginia. Robin is a sales representative for Cruise Ships in Florida. Bob (who is also a Rotarian) owns Acres of Fun, is a CPA and has his Masters in Taxation. Kelly teaches at Ida Sue School. They have 7 grandchildren, one step-grandchild and two great grandchildren.

Bob was inducted into Rotary over 50 years ago and was introduced by "Rackie Young." Almost all Rotarians (except perhaps some newer members) know that Bob has solicited Rotary volunteers for the Salvation Army "bell ringing" over the holidays. Bob stated that he can't remember how long he has done it but he has enjoyed it because of the respect that he has for the Salvation Army and the work they do. Bob and Lillian have been in charge of the "check in" desk for the Rotary Auction for more years than they can remember. Bob served on the Rotary Board and also remembers being a "grunt" and doing various jobs at the Auction in his younger years. Bob has served over 20 years on the Crippled Children's Board and he is now an Honorary Board Member. Bob and Lillian belong to the First Methodist Church where he has served on various committees. Are you starting to understand a little more about Bob? When he is passionate about something, he is dedicated and works long and hard.

Now, we will talk about Bob's true love. Of course, this is second to Lillian. In 1963, Bob and Lillian started in the horse training business. They sometimes had as many as 30 to 40 horses. They actually owned about 20 of them. They had a full time employee. They recalled going to a race in Florida where one of their horses set a track record. The business took a turn at this point and many people were interested in their horses.

They specifically remembered selling "Dream of Might" to a gentleman from Italy. The buyer wanted to give him a personal check and then fly the horse to Italy. When Bob told the buyer that would not work. His response was "No Trust?" Bob then replied, "I wouldn't trust my grandmother with this much money!" So, he got a "Bank Check" to

finalize the deal. This buyer took their trainer, an interpreter, Bob and Lillian and “Dream of Might” to Italy for the big race. They were treated like royalty on this trip. Although “Dream of Might” didn’t win the first year he raced in Italy, he did win the “Lotteroy” race the second year. They have sold horses to Germany, Finland and five in Europe.

When the Johns’ came to Wooster in 1960, they built a house on Mayflower Drive. They lived there for 4 years. However, because of their love and desire to own horses, they sold their home to the Hoover’s. They bought a farm at 4153 Friendsville Road. Over the years, they have kept in touch with the Hoover’s and knew that one of them had passed away and the other was in a nursing home. Thinking of their retirement life, they contacted the Hoover family. They again purchased the home they had originally built in 1960 and they’re still settling in as they have just moved back in the last two months. They still board a few horses in Charm.

When I asked Bob to tell me about the best thing that had ever happened in his life, without hesitation, he said, “In May of this year, Lillian and I will celebrate our 65th anniversary so I think that’s pretty special.” I thoroughly enjoyed their enthusiasm for life and their love of family and community. Bob said, “My life has been fun and interesting and I feel so blessed to have chosen Wooster as my home. It has been good to us.” And as you can tell from this story, “They have also been good for Wooster.”