

Eulogy for Sitges Haydel, Husband of Verdie Bolner Haydel

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By Jim Bolner, Sr.

It's an honor to be invited by Verdie and the family to speak briefly about Sitges.

I have known him ever since he was courting Verdie in the 1940's. I remember when Verdie had brought him to meet our parents in Avoyelles Parish and Sitges stepped out of the car wearing a greenish military uniform and a very large cap—this made a big impression on me. I knew right away that he was a good man because our mother approved of him. In fact, she and Sitges remained close throughout their lives.

He was a gentle man and a gentleman. He was quiet and thoughtful. He was the embodiment of faithfulness. He had a deep faith in God and he was a devout and observant Catholic. He loved sports and especially the Hanson sports teams. His having played on the Hanson baseball team as a student had made an indelible mark on his spirit. Verdie reminded me that he served as an unpaid scout for the Hanson athletic program, tipping off the Hanson coach about promising prospects at other schools. Later on in life he followed the fortunes of the St. Louis Cardinals and then his loyalty shifted to the Atlanta Braves. He was knowledgeable about football but baseball was his true love. My memory is not what it was, but I vaguely recall Sitges being associated with certain baseball betting pool activities along Willow Street when I would visit in the summers. Sitges had a wholesome sense of humor. He made Verdie laugh and all those around him smile. He was not a joke teller, but he appeared to know the history of everyone interesting who had ever lived in Franklin and loved to recount their exploits.

Sitges was a model family man. He was a faithful and loyal husband for Verdie and a generous and loving father for their children, but his virtues as a family man shine through for me when I remember the way that Sitges treated our parents, and especially our mother. Our mother lived for a number of years with Verdie and Zulie, alternating between one home and the other. Sitges, like Herbert, had a wonderful relationship with my mother—caring for her every need, propping up her spirits, lovingly teasing her to amuse her and to keep her alert.

One vignette captures the essence of Sitges' character. On Tuesday, when Verdie went into the room where Sitges was to say her last goodbye, she told him how much she loved him and how much the family loved him, and how much

they would miss him. Then she said: "Daddy, when there were decisions to be made, you always did the right thing."

Sitges loved to cook—for my mother and for everyone. He enjoyed cooking. Now lots of people love to cook but aren't good cooks. But Sitges was an excellent cook. He cooked a wide variety of dishes and wasn't afraid of experimenting—such as by putting blackeye peas in jambalaya. But most of all he is famous for his gumbo. I can see him now stirring the big pot of gumbo on the stove.

What a beautiful statement to make about a friend and relative: he was a faithful and loving husband, a generous and loving father; he was gentle and kind with all those he encountered; he was a dedicated worker; he was a loyal friend; he served his country with honor; he lived out his faith in service to others.

Here is a closing passage--a quote from the plaque of his high school days:

"A friend who makes salt sweet and blackness bright...

"A fine fellow and a jolly one is Sitges. Very seldom is a good time out of his reach, and where he is there is the life of the party. Here is a lad who is not afraid to let the world know about himself, and we are sure the world will hear more of him."