

“Echoes of the Heart”

Reflections on Life and Community Living

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Life transitions—Bill Graham. While not an accolade we easily ascribe to people, Bill Graham was a great man. He was also a gifted conversationalist and a man with a contagious passion for the human situation.

Many people will remember Bill, who died on January 17th, as the visionary founder of Miami Lakes and the retired CEO of the Graham Companies. Others will remember him as a skilled dairyman or as an expert breeder of Black Angus cattle. In all of these considerable ventures, he was the consummate master of detail, in light of the *big picture*, in the pursuit of excellence.

I remember Bill for his wonderful World War II stories, his unflappable optimism and for fun, fiery conversations on just about everything. Around discussions of international relations, national politics, sports and global warming, what I liked most about Bill was his passion for life.

Through the countless stories and vivid memories recalled, over time, the qualities of greatness that made him such a highly respected and revered man were revealed. As we think about ourselves and our own lives among family and friends, what are some of the qualities of greatness that lift us to a higher place?

Humility and compassion. Humility and compassion are two of the most quintessential values of all the major religions.

Humility, of course, is something we cannot claim for ourselves without losing it. In that sense, it's elusive. But it's that quality that enables us to *see the big picture* of life and to realize how, at the end of the day, we're all in this life together and *there but for the grace of God go I*.

True humility takes an interest in other people; it asks questions of them, about who they are and what they think. A humble spirit rejoices in seeing others rise up and enjoy their hour in the sun. Humble people are willing to make themselves vulnerable. They don't have to have all the answers or always be *right*.

Bill Graham was a humble man. He was also a man of striking compassion. It troubled him deeply to see all the violence in our communities, along with the senseless acts of terrorism around the world. He never claimed to have the answers, but—always—he cared.

Moral conviction and purpose. In the long term, no person can be an effective leader without strong moral conviction and purpose. For the leader and, more still, for those who would follow, this moral grounding sets the standard and helps keep everything and everybody on track.

Over time, these standards play a critical role in building up the trust and confidence that translate into fairness and justice as our lives unfold.

Moral conviction and purpose were ingrained in Bill from an early age. For him there were no short-cuts to integrity and honesty. *Treat people right, do the right thing*; these were qualities Bill lived by throughout his life. They were simply second nature to who he was—a man of esteemed honor in everything he did.

Intellectual depth and judgment. High intelligence may not be an absolute requirement for greatness in life, but an intellect—mature and well balanced—can certainly make a big difference along the way.

Being able to make discerning judgments—judgments that need to be thought out with regard to consequences and the long term—is an invaluable asset. Bill Graham had this gift.

During the time I knew Bill, I can't tell you the number of times people would comment, *He's one of the smartest men I've ever known.* Again, Bill had the ability to see the big picture, anticipate consequences, sort out what was important and arrive at reasoned, balanced decisions.

Largeness of spirit. In many ways, greatness is about the size of one's spirit. It's about how big of a world we choose to live in. Those who define their lives and their values through a narrow ideology, invariably, have a small spirit and live in a smaller world.

With people of large spirit, there's always room for more—more ideas, more relationships, and more conversation about virtually anything. That's why having a big spirit is such an important quality. Always (or, most of the time), it's welcoming and open and, therein, tolerant and patient.

Bill Graham was a man of large spirit. As the visionary and developer of Miami Lakes, Bill's imprint is all over this wonderful community in which we live. For this, we are grateful. However, we are thankful, too, for Bill Graham the human being—a man of eminent stature from whom we can all learn and grow.