



Ralph Deneen Bonham

March 12, 1932 - January 14, 2020

The renowned inventor and entrepreneur Ralph D. Bonham, age 87, passed away at his home in Orem, surrounded by his family on Tuesday January 14, 2020. He was born on March 12, 1932 in Ogden, Utah to Bond and Dorma Bonham. Ralph attended high school in Pomona California where he met and later married Mary Ruth Rider. Ralph had a deep love for mountains and hunting; to fill that void in California he turned to sports. Upon graduation Ralph chose, out of many offers, a full ride athletic scholarship to the then, unknown, Brigham Young University in Utah. His choice was driven by his longing to hunt and explore the Utah mountains again. At BYU Ralph studied mechanical engineering and excelled in basketball and track & field- high jumping. He was on the first BYU track team to tour Europe. Ralph ended his studies at BYU within months of graduation to focus on his growing business.

During his lifetime Ralph invented, developed and manufactured hundreds of new products spanning some 25 separate industries/markets; most of which he did in partnership with his father Bond who was also a very successful entrepreneur. Ralph invented innovative products his entire life; his mind remained sharp, bright and creative to his very last day of life, as he discussed with his sons design details of his latest invention, which he had in the final stages of development (an invention that would revolutionize the recreational fishing market) only hours before his passing.

Ralph's best known invention was the Tote-Gote; the very first off-highway motorcycle. Initially designed to aid in hunting and hauling big game out of the highest mountains, the Tote-Gote became famous world wide to the military and forestry departments of several countries, hunters, fishermen, sportsmen and outdoor enthusiasts as they were amazed by its "go anywhere" rugged nature. The Tote-Gote revolutionized virtually every aspect of hunting and outdoor recreation.

Ralph held many positions in the LDS Church over his entire lifetime, serving in Scouting, Sunday School and Priesthood. Ralph and Marilyn Alter were married in 1986. All who knew Ralph loved his fun, teasing and joking personality; he was seldom seen without his

friendly, infectious and optimistic smile. Ralph was an exceptional problem solver and could always be counted on to drop everything and help friends, family and total strangers.

As Ralph goes ahead to scout out the new “territory” he leaves behind:

His wife, Marilyn Alter Bonham, Jennie Buckwalter Nelson (Mark), Laurie Bedard (Bart), Bradley Buckwalter, Michael Buckwalter. Also: Paul R Bonham, Brent Bonham (Christy), Russ R Bonham (Wendy), Anne Bonham O’Neill (Chris), Liz Bonham Smith (Robert), Joseph David Bonham (Kristy).

Ralph’s Grandchildren:

Weston Bonham (CaSondra), Braydon Bonham (Jessica), Chris Bonham (Alina), Michael Bonham (Melissa), Michelle Reay (Weston), Stephanie Bonham, Ryan Bonham, Emily Bonham, Garet Bonham, Eric Bonham (Hannah), Katelyn Bonham, Kamilyn Parker (Gage), Christopher O’Neill (Alexa), Carlie Adams (Brett), Gabriel O’Neill, Abigail O’Neill, Caleb O’Neill, Kassandre Alvey(Chris), Kailan Smith, Valarie Smith, Braxton Smith, Wesley Smith, Tyler Nelson (Chelcea), Kylie Thorpe (Kevin), Brock Nelson (Lacey), Heather Nelson, Jayden Bonham, Skyler Bonham, Layla Bonham, Stryker Bonham.

Great Grandchildren:

Aliyah, Oakley, Lilly, Brody, Daniel, Ellie, Eli, Emily, Tyler, Dillan, Chris, Mackenzie, Madelyn, Odin, Atreus, Bentley, Lincoln, Grayson, Bristol, Royce, Treydon, Trevon, Audrianna, Easton, Brielle, Ryker, Quinnlie, and Summit.

A viewing will be held on Thursday January 23rd at 11:30 AM followed by a service at 1:00 PM, both at the LDS chapel at 1485 N 800 W Orem, Utah. There will be a 21 gun, military honor guard salute, right after the service.

For more information about the Life of Ralph Bonham:

<http://users.infoconex.com/~ramrod/tghistory.htm>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tote_Gote

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFYGC22YJm8>

LIFE SKETCH: RALPH BONHAM

January 23, 2020

Ralph Bonham was born with an innate love of mountains, hunting, exploration and adventure in Ogden in 1932. He was a Utah “boy” and a Mormon through and through. His parents, Bond and Dorma Bonham, taught him to love hard work and to make the most of very little while surviving the severe economies of the Great Depression, massive recessions and WWII; qualities that Ralph would retain his entire life.

As a young boy he would hunt every spare moment that he had with his brother Neil and friends. He would hand carve flipper crotches from a tree branch and wire surgical tubing with a leather section to it, creating a surprisingly deadly weapon. He later became an excellent marksman with a BB gun, then a .22, then a shotgun and on to high powered rifles. He often brought home extra food for the table...all totally legal...of course! Ralph had a strict rule all his life "you kill it...you eat it"...right down to porcupines and rattlesnakes!

Ralph attended six different grammar schools in three different states as his father moved wherever he had to for work to provide for his family. He attended high school in Pomona California where he was quite the athletic stud (your program shows him looking much like James Dean coolly leaned up against his hotrod at age 17). Ralph could not hunt in California and to fill the void he turned to sports although he really had little interest in them. He quickly discovered that he had been blessed with exceptional, natural athletic abilities in several sports. His athletic abilities would serve him well for decades and probably saved his life (don't worry, I'll explain later). During high school he averaged 20 points per game in basketball, set basketball and track records, played on all-star teams and still had time to fall in love with the prom queen Mary Ruth Rider.

Graduating from high school Ralph received full ride athletic scholarship offers from many large, prestigious colleges including Stanford. But Ralph longed to be back in the Utah mountains where he could hunt and fish again. Staying true to himself, he turned down all offers and wrote to Brigham Young University asking for a full ride scholarship. They granted him a scholarship to play basketball. Stanford University was quite insulted and perplexed by his choice and in a letter, expressed their dismay asking why he'd chosen an unknown university with a paltry 5000 student body over them!

While at BYU Ralph studied engineering and business management. He lived in dorms that were actual barracks that BYU had purchased from the Army (they have reportedly upgraded the dorms since then, lol). Ralph would hunt rabbits, quail, grouse, pheasants, deer and even ducks on the face of "Y" mountain and around the barracks...all totally legal...of course!

Again, at college, Ralph excelled in sports setting basketball and track records (high jumping). He went into the army his sophomore year and he and Mary were stationed in San Antonio, Texas.

The Army trained Ralph as a medic. Just 30 days before he was to ship out to Korea the

Army discovered his athletic achievements and canceled his deployment. They put him on the Army basketball and track & field teams. (This is the part where his athletic skills very likely saved his life.) Medics carried no weapons and ran around the battlefield with a big red “target” on their helmets, chest and back; the enemy specifically targeted them; he almost certainly would have been “toast” in Korea! Ralph set and held new Army high jumping records which held for years. (“Be the best that you can be”...right? Lol) After his discharge from the Army, Ralph moved his family back to Provo and continued his schooling. He was on the first BYU track team to tour Europe. He continued to hunt and fish which helped feed his family.

During a particularly long, arduous haul of a large buck on a hunting trip out west of Utah Lake, Ralph decided there had to be a better way. He immediately began developing (more like scabbing together) a crude machine in 1957 for riding and for hauling his big game animals. (Photos of the first machines are on links in his obituary.) He quickly improved prototypes of his machine and the world was about to experience an outdoor revolution like never before seen. His new invention, the Tote-Gote was the very first off-highway motorcycle. Ralph and his father began manufacturing the “Gote” and within a few short years it was selling beyond expectations. Ralph ended his studies only a few months short of graduation in order to focus on his fast growing business.

Initially designed to aid in hunting and hauling big game out of the highest mountains, the Tote-Gote became famous worldwide to the military and forestry departments of several countries, utility companies, hunters, fishermen, mining companies, sportsmen and outdoor enthusiasts as they were amazed by its “go anywhere” rugged nature. The Tote-Gote revolutionized virtually every aspect of hunting and outdoor recreation and to this day, over 60 years after Ralph invented it, every October, Tote-Gotes STILL “come out of the woodwork” for the opening of the big game seasons of elk and deer.

Ralph and Mary enjoyed traveling, introducing the Tote-Gote to governments of other countries. They took their children on hundreds of camping and hunting trips; instilling in them a profound love of family, nature, hunting and wildlife.

Ralph gave relatively few lectures to his kids...but taught by silent example...endless, consistent, powerful example. You very rarely saw him angry or yelling...but on a few occasions you'd get a well deserved kick in the butt.

During his lifetime Ralph invented, developed and manufactured hundreds of new products spanning some 25 separate industries/markets; most of which he did in partnership with his father Bond who was also a successful entrepreneur.

Ralph loved to explore; he loved adventure! He spent years of his life, on the side, prospecting for gold. He invented and fabricated new types of gold recovery equipment. He manufactured snowmobiles, swamp machines for duck hunting, three wheeled utility vehicles, aluminum utility trailers, home appliances, ATV's and hunting systems. Ralph invented innovative products his entire life; his mind remained sharp, bright and creative to his very last day of life, as he discussed with his sons design details of his latest invention, (which he had in the final stages of development) just hours before his passing. This latest invention can revolutionize the recreational fishing market in all the same ways that the Tote-Gote did...that's how Ralph Bonham does things.

Ralph was unique in almost everything he did. He used a technique in hunting called "instinct shooting". He'd grind the sites clean off of all his guns and then not even aim; just look at the target with both eyes and fire. This was particularly effect for dropping fast moving game on the run. He used unconventional weapons and devised scabbards for "quick draw" shooting from a machine (which is a really good way to get a fine THESE days.lol) He sporterized the legendary M1-Garand which gave him semi-automatic firepower while hunting deer and elk as well as .22's for cottontail. He'd often sound like a one man war zone shooting at fast moving game 500 yards away, running through heavy timber. On one occasion he emptied a number of clips through his M-1 at a large buck at great distance. The familiar ping, ping, ping rang out each time the action ejected the empty clip and he quickly shoved a full, eight round clip in. When he finally dropped it he remarked "got him"! His hunting friend joked "well I would think so!" "With that many rounds, Ralph, you could have dug a hole and buried him!"

After dropping two large bucks he would haul them out at the same time. Try to picture in your mind, Ralph, on a Tote-Gote, riding up a steep mountain side, no trail, with these two large deer stacked on top of each other and wrapped around the Gote...AND a small kid sitting on top of the two deer, holding onto dads shoulders for dear life, pretending not to be terrified! That's how he...rolled...literally!

When his kids were in grade school Ralph felt they were watching too much TV so he mounted a coin meter on it! They had to drop a quarter in to watch 15 minutes of TV! Back in 1962, twenty five cents was serious coin to a grade school kid and it severely limited TV time. That is... until they found the key to the meter...and the inserted quarters; a closely guarded secret...until just now!

Ralph loved pine nuts! And again, he had his unique way of harvesting them. He'd haul a forklift to the mountains. He'd place a huge tarp with a hole in the center under the pine tree. He'd raise the mast up high on the forklift and ram the tree numerous times, shaking

all the pinecones out and onto the tarp...then move to the next tree.

Ralph met and fell in love with Marilyn Alter while square dancing, they were married in 1986. Ralph continued new product and business development.

Ralph served in the church his entire life. He is known for his infectious smile, his teasing manner and his selflessness. He would seldom miss an opportunity to drop everything and help family, friends or total strangers with his exceptional problem solving skills. If you had the privilege of knowing Ralph here on earth you almost certainly counted yourself lucky. If you did not...you will have an opportunity later on, grab it!

Comments



“ Just saw the news about Mr. Bonham.
I am a fan, never had the chance to meet him. In the 60's I fell in love with the tote gotes. Not until the 80's did i have one to restore. Now with one Model B and also Homelite Trail King, I am ready for any future gathering of Gote Folk.
Scott Carlson, Cloverdale, Ca.

Scott Carlson - November 14, 2020 at 05:24 PM



“ Ralph came to see my dad in the hospital about 10 years ago. I don't know how he even knew dad was there. It was great to see him again and they had a great time reminiscing. It was great how Ralph brought that infectious happiness into the room. My personal memories are few, but I remember Ralph taking me to town in Payson and buying me an ice cream sandwich. I believe it was in a green and white be bus, but I was awful young to be sure of that. I also remember camping with him and the family which included tote Gotes and the Tug-Bug”. I recall it coming back to shore with 4 fish on the lines. He shared a story at the hospital of him poking my dad in the chest with a pencil and my dad knocked him on his backside...and he was dad's boss! He was a good and kind man and I am proud to have known him

Darrell Thompson - September 28, 2020 at 12:27 AM



“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Richard Trotter - January 22, 2020 at 02:02 PM



“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Liz Smith - January 21, 2020 at 08:29 PM



“ Our thoughts are with the family. With his creation he has given so many folks joy in their lives. RIP. CALIFORNIA

Jackie - January 22, 2020 at 06:07 PM



“ Great picture. Ralph was one of the good guys. Loved our visits. We were blessed to have him and Marilyn as our neighbors for so long. Thoughts & Prayers, Scott & Dezi Cannon and boys.

Dezi Cannon - January 23, 2020 at 11:06 AM



“ I learned so much from this wonderful Man. Loved our scrap yard visits. RIP Ralph.
Shelli
MCR Recycling

Shelli Magdaleno - February 17, 2020 at 06:04 PM