

Service for Reverend Allen, December 21, 2016, St. John's Church, Portsmouth, NH

My name is James Petersen, President of the Portsmouth Rotary Club  
It is truly an honor to join you here today to celebrate the life of  
Reverend Allen. Someone so loved, respected and appreciated in our  
community.

A word on language to begin. In Rotary we called him Rev Allen. A few  
years back I think it was Tony Delyani who asked Rev Allen if we should  
be calling him Father Allen. He said "doesn't matter." And that was  
that.

Reverend Allen was a constant in the Portsmouth Rotary Club.  
Presidents come and go every year. New members come and go for  
various reasons.

Reverend Allen was a member for 39 years, he showed up every week  
to meetings, and was reliably there for families during periods of  
sickness and grief. Fellow Rotarian John Rice put it this way "he picked  
up with Rotary where he left off with his parishioners at St. John's."

His reliability and service, although impressive, will not be what he is  
most remembered for in our club. It will be his weekly invocations.  
They were truly spectacular and are legendary in our club. Week in and  
week out he prepared and delivered them, a master at work.

We begin our weekly meetings at Rotary first with the pledge of  
allegiance, followed by a patriotic song, then a Rotary pledge to be  
honest, fair, good and beneficial in our lives, and finally for as many  
years as I can remember we have looked to Rev. Allen for the  
invocation.

His invocations were poetic, lengthy but never too long, they were often dramatic, always announced clearly with his beautiful English accent, and projected as if from a stage never requiring a mic. Rev. Allen alone never required a mic.

They had a wow factor. First timers to a Portsmouth Rotary meeting, would often turn and say “Wow, who is that guy? That was amazing! You are so lucky to have him! What a voice!”

His invocations transcended religion. The experience was so much more than a simple prayer making them universally appreciated by both believers and non-believers alike.

His invocations were not only for us. I believe they were for Reverend Allen too. They were a weekly, public expression of his own deep faith.

This past summer Reverend Allen’s faith apparently was rewarded when against long odds he won the 50/50 raffle for a three consecutive weeks. I don’t recall this ever happening before.

There were playful jeers from the crowd including claims that “the system is rigged.” “Let God Decide” was Rev. Allen’s prompt response as he walked to the front of the room to collect his reward with his winning ticket in hand and a finger pointed to the heavens. He collected the money and over the noise of the crowd said that the proceeds would be donated, as he always did, to the Salvation Army.

Much of the pleasure of knowing Reverend Allen was learning about the breadth and depth of a life well lived.

His intellectual curiosity appeared to be boundless. He also had self-confidence and was not much hindered by fear. Couple these traits with 87 years of learning and exploring and one amasses skills and wisdom that need to be shared.

He was modest though which leaves us with an unfortunate truth that there were many interesting life experiences and words of wisdom that likely went unheard.

Rev. Allen was multi-lingual. Every March around St. Patrick's Day he would perform the invocation in Gaelic. To me it sounded like a mouthful of marbles so thankfully he provided a translation, which sometimes I also did not understand. What wisdom he did share was treasured by our members.

Recently I learned that Rev. Allen was a veteran. Around Veteran's Day I attempted to identify and recognize each veteran in our club – there are many, and I discovered that I missed a few. I am thankful that Dave Holden, a member of our club stood up and pointed out that I had missed acknowledging Rev. Allen's service. Later that day I called Rev. Allen to learn about his service. Not surprisingly it was a story worth sharing.

It turns out he had completed requisite service in the British Army in 1948 and 1949 and it had been a whirlwind experience.

In just a few minutes I learned of a country that I had never heard of (Malaya, now part of Malaysia), and a war I had never heard of (The Malayan Emergency that started in 1948).

Rev. Allen told me he was sent to fight in a guerilla war in a jungle that featured terrorist style ambushes and raids by a local ethnic Chinese group attempting a communist over-throw of the British backed local government. Rev. Allen was shot at but was not injured, although he did require rescue and said he had felt fortunate to escape there with his life. Hundreds of British Army troops died in that conflict.

My response was “Reverend Allen, the club will want to hear about your experience.” He agreed to speak briefly about it “off the cuff” in his words. I scheduled him to speak on December 1<sup>st</sup> , and then I had to bump him to December 15<sup>th</sup>. Unfortunately for us in the interim “God decided”.

Lesson learned – don’t wait when an 87 year old has something to contribute.

Rev Allen died while enjoying one of his twice daily walks with his dog Molly, on his winding streamside path in the woods behind his country home. It was a crisp December day, the first snowflakes of the season falling through the trees and dusting the forest floor. I doubt he would have chosen much differently.

He was a man of deep integrity and as a result was deeply respected. It is hard to imagine anyone else getting away with standing up in the middle of a Rotary meeting, unscripted without warning, to offer some interesting or pertinent fact. These were welcome interruptions to which no one ever objected.

On one such occasion he enlightened us on the origin of the recipe of our dish for the day – beef wellington. He said that the recipe's origin was attributed to Arthur Wellesley, 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Wellington.

We will miss Reverend Allen, but we in this community are also filled with gratitude today. For 40 plus years, we were the beneficiaries of Rev. Allen. He was a gift. Each of us surely has his or her favorite memory of Rev. Allen that we can each hold onto.

In the theater of what is a Rotary meeting, his part will not be replaced. We will move on however, at a loss for now, but other players will emerge, they always do. And Rev Allen would insist it be that way.