

The Clifford Chapman I Knew

By Clayton Marsh

I was lucky enough to meet Clifford and Don in 1999, during one of the charity events of that year held here on these grounds (Chapman Estate). When I think of how to describe Clifford, I'm overwhelmed by words that could be used to delineate the many facets of Clifford's personality: intelligent, congenial, quick-witted, gregarious, humorous, spiritual, compassionate, curious, forgiving, wise, and loving. Like Will Rogers, Clifford never seemed to meet anyone he did not like. However, we must remember that Clifford also possessed a temperament that was inherited from his Spanish ancestors, and which, on occasion, could reveal itself.

To me, Clifford was a true renaissance man: one with wide-ranging interests and talents. He had a deep sense of propriety and honor. Clifford was public in many of his philanthropic interests, but certain others were unique and personal to him and Don. Having served as a board member and in several officer positions with GALA in the past thirteen years, I can readily affirm that the generosity and encouragement extended to the organization by Clifford and Don is appreciated more than words can say. Clifford was a role model to be followed in his civic involvement.

There were only a couple of things that Clifford disliked other people doing, but he was too much of a gentleman to ever take anyone to task for having done them. One was the use of his middle name -- Wayne. The other was when people addressed him as "Cliff" instead of "Clifford." He knew that most people were trying to use it as a term of endearment rather than untoward familiarity. Clifford told me more than once that he enjoyed having parties and large gatherings, and how the house seemed to come alive when groups of people were present. This generosity extended to cooking and serving meals to the homeless in San Luis Obispo. Also, he was known to take food to his friends when they were ill.

He liked and encouraged some traditions and ceremonies, such as the railroad chimes that would be sounded to call everyone into the refectory, the singing of the "Amen" before the meal, and the Buddhist prayer bell that he would ring at the dining table to obtain everyone's attention. He loved the chance to try out a new recipe on us before serving it to the prestigious executives and boards of directors of the various organizations in the area.

In the past thirteen years, I have lost count of the wonderful meals that Clifford cooked and shared with us and our visiting out-of-town friends and family.

Not only was Clifford a gracious host and a marvelous cook, he also mastered the art of baking delicious breads.

Clifford disliked waste of any kind. The fruit of his orchard and the produce of his garden were canned as delicious jams or marmalades for later use. Both fresh produce and canned goods were shared with others. Clifford's compassionate side was evident in the manner in which he served as executor for the estates of others and the special bonds he built with the survivors. He was a guiding light upon which many depended.

Clifford enjoyed surprises, although the invitations always read: "No gifts." He really enjoyed little gag gifts of no intrinsic value.

I recall the fun we had on the field trips we took. Once we traveled to a mountain top ranch west of Paso Robles, another time we went to see the desert wildflowers on the Carrizo Plains, and on a trip to the Piedras Blancas lighthouse and Ragged Point for lunch. The biggest surprise of all was in 2007, when Clifford invited us to join him in a mystery trip for his birthday. We met here at the house, loaded into stretch limos, proceeded by a very circuitous route, and arrived at a pier in Morro Bay where we embarked on the Papagallo II for a dinner cruise that was most memorable and most enjoyable.

Clifford was always mindful of his larger circle of friends that he had made over the years in business in San Luis Obispo County. He loved to do the annual Fourth of July barbeque, as well as the annual Christmas cocktail party as a gift to the community at large.

"Good night, sweet prince. And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest."