

REMEMBERING MR. BILL FOY

When we first met the Brown family in 1982, a problem immediately surfaced: what to call Mr. Brown. His wife, Judy, referred to him as "Bill," but their mailbox said "Foy." My wife soon resolved the dilemma by dubbing him "Mr. Bill Foy," a term of endearment that even his recent death hasn't erased.

Some knew Mr. Bill Foy as a devoted husband and father, a lover of animals, a connoisseur of classical music, a fierce competitor at games and an avid follower of the Razorbacks. So did I, but the Bill Foy I observed on Labor Day was the one I was privileged to describe at his funeral at Oak Cliff Baptist Church.

With the rest of the household departed to the mall, I had a few minutes alone with him. And in that quiet hour I posed a question we had often discussed. "Mr. Bill Foy, do you remember our trips to the Buffalo River?"

Momentarily, the torments of aggressive cancer vanished from his eyes, and he brightly replied. "Yes, I do. They were some of the highlights of my life." And for too brief a season we relived several expeditions, especially the splendid four-day float for four fathers and their teenage sons facilitated by John Sherman Gilliom. We savored again the fish, fries, hush puppies and apple fritters cooked and consumed on a gravel bar near Cow Creek.

As our reminiscences drew to a close, he shared a difficult conclusion with me. "Mr. James, I'm reconciled to the fact that I've floated the Buffalo for the last time. And I've been to see the Razorbacks play at Bud Walton Arena for the last time. That's hard for me, but I'm at peace with it."

There's a sober peculiarity about last times. All parents remember their children's first steps and first words, but who can recall the last tuck into bed, the last story book, the last ride on the merry-go-round? Last times don't declare themselves as such.

I returned home that evening with a question on my mind: had I seen Mr. Bill Foy for the last time? Circumstances did allow us one more trip to Fort Smith to see him just as his health began the downward spiral that would shortly terminate in death.

Why would such a quiet, unassuming man have to experience the sufferings and indignities that we all pray to avoid? He certainly wouldn't have chosen that path for himself. Regardless, he endured it all without a word of grumbling.

I've known skeptics who claim to doubt God because they see good people suffer in such slow, lingering declines. But I must be honest at this point: watching Mr. Bill Foy patiently endure suffering without complaint proves to me the reality of the God he professed to trust.

Were I able to communicate with him face to face today, I'd say, "Thank you, Mr. Bill Foy, for showing me how a real Christian suffers. Your outward demeanor demonstrated the unseen, inner reality of a God who is good and who will surely reward those who put their confidence in Him."

My friend, Foy William Brown, Jr., departed this life on December 9, 2004, having attained the age of 70 years. I will miss him.