



John Benner Stockton

February 5, 1920 - December 20, 2016

John Benner Stockton... A Life Remembered

My name is Tim Mowrey, and it's a great honor that John's wife, Alice, asked me to be here today and celebrate the life of her love of nearly 45 years, John Stockton, whose biography is so fascinating and full of adventure and grace.

Most recently in our friendship I've had the privilege of taking John to doctor appointments at the VA Hospital and other doctors, too. We would always share the most interesting discussions about topics ranging from everyday life experiences, though one can't really refer to his John's life experiences as "everyday" as most folks interpret them, to his very active spiritual life that he felt kept him going.

John could barely talk about his life, without bringing Alice into the conversation. He loved her so very deeply, and credited her with the reason he was still alive. We also shared a few catfish lunches at one of his favorite dives, where he introduced me to the best Key Lime Pie in Texas. Truth be known, that he always ordered the pie, before ordering his fish, is a clue that it was probably for that pie that he kept going back.

One quick story I would like to share with you. I once told John about an Art teacher I had in college, who took our class out to a lake, and she brought us all up to a very large old oak tree and had us line up and join hands. Then, the two people on the ends moved around the tree and joined hands, forming a circle. I was in the center of the line, so I didn't move. Beginning with me the instructor had us all describe the tree, moving around the circle. I described a stalwart huge old tree with far-reaching branches to give shade and siring thousands of offspring and squirrel food, etc. By the time the person opposite me spoke, whom I couldn't even see through the girth of the trunk, a tree riddled with disease and decay and swarming with insects was described. The lesson was to stress the importance of perspective, and how important it is to consider it when representing a subject. The person opposite me and I had both told the absolute truth about the tree, from our perspectives, but on the surface it may appear we were opposed to one another. John said, "So you have to walk around the whole tree to get beneath the surface and know the truth of it, don't you? There's not really individual truth, but only individual perspective."

We have the good fortune today to see the tree of John's life from his perspective,

excerpted from an autobiography he wrote when he was 89, 7 years ago. In John's own words . . .

I was born on February 5, 1920. Mother's maiden name: Opal Graham, born in Mercer, Missouri

Father: Price Gould Stockton, born in Ashland, Kansas

My paternal grandmother, Jessie Gould Stockton, was born into the wealth and fame of the Jewish Gould family, of the Dole Pineapple Company in Hawaii. She was disinherited when she married my grandfather, John Benner Stockton, whose family had a farm one mile west of Chillicothe, Mo. My grandfather was a station agent at Lawson, Mo.

My great-grandfather kept horses on his farm located on a trail by a farm located one mile west of town. He took in horses that were crippled on the trail, cured them, and then traded them up, once they were well. This practice of trading horses made him a good living

In 1919 my father, Price, and my Uncle Ray installed an ice cream plant on the farm and sold ice cream around the neighboring towns. They were successful for a few years, however, competition from Kansas City moved into the region, and coupled with some bad behavior due to my Uncle Ray's alcoholism, they were forced out of business. Uncle Ray soon became a famous violin player and later became the Conductor of the Kansas City Philharmonic Orchestra. Later, he was found dead in his car with a gallon of bourbon.

My father went to Chillicothe Business College and learned to telegraph.

In 1925, at age 5, we moved to Wynoka, Ok., where my father worked for Santa Fe Railroad. He worked as an extra, filling in for employees on vacation, and, consequently, we lived in several Oklahoma towns. He never had a steady job, until around 1936 in Black, Texas, 7 miles from Friona, Texas. Black, Texas had one depot, one post office and one grain elevator.

In 1930 my parents split for about two years and I, at age ten, went to live with my grandparents at Lawson, Missouri. Every two weeks my father sent money for my upkeep. I really don't remember very much between the ages of six and ten, only that we moved from town to town, and every time I entered a new school I had to prove my manhood, by standing up to the town bully. My father told me to knock down the town bully, and before he had any idea what was coming, I would swing first. It worked every time and I was always well accepted and always became a school hero.

Living with my grandparents was real nice. My grandmother always had cookies and bread covered with butter and sugar when I came home from school. I did not like to wear the knee pants she had for me, so I hid a pair of jeans in a hollow tree and changed into them each day when I went to school. She never caught on in 3 years. I learned to ice skate, joined the boy scouts and enjoyed life. One Christmas my father came from Texas and took me to St Joseph, Missouri and purchased a bicycle. This was one of the best

moments of my life.

My mother and father reunited and I went to live with them as a family in 1933, in Amarillo, Texas. Times were hard and we lived in a one room apartment. I slept on the couch and food was scarce. Our apartment house was close to a residence owned by the owner of a Jewelry Store called, Finkley Jewelers, and their daughter, Sid, and I were very close. I carried her books and walked her to school. Little could I realize that she would grow up and become famous, or that I would be a multi-millionaire by age 45. Sid Finkley went to dancing school, then Hollywood, and then became the famous dancer and actress, Cyd Charisse, who married singer, Tony Martin.

There was a brand new 33 Chevy on the new car dealers showroom floor in 1933. For several months I never saw one on the street, until one day when our landlord came to collect the rent. He was driving a 33 Chevy. At that moment I made up my mind that when I grew up, I would own apartments, because if you own apartments you can afford new cars.

In 1934 I was age 14 we moved to Texaco, New Mexico and I was first string on the senior football team. The coach of the Clovis, New Mexico High School called on my father and offered me a room in the high school for being night watchman, and a job at the Busy Bee Café. I accepted and would arrive at the cafe every morning at 4:30 a.m., make two huge drums of coffee, sweep the floor and clean all the tables. My total income was \$6.00 per week and all the food I could eat. I played football on the team that would become the state champions, played baseball, and ran track. I would spend summers with my parents in whatever town they were in.

When I was no longer eligible to play high school football, I still had one more year to complete my high school diploma. By this time my father had his steady job in Black, Texas, and I moved in with my parents. I rode the school bus to Friona High School in Friona, Texas and graduated, but before graduation I fell in love and married Miss Nell Chiles. I became very close friends with her brother, Tom, who later became my business partner in 1955, and we still own real estate together.

Tom and I used to slip out of the house at sundown and steal a big hen chicken, walk two miles to Friona, sell it, and then buy hamburgers and play pool all evening.

My wife's folks farmed several hundred acres of cotton and wheat, and were very poor, as I was. One Fall Tom had to stay out of school for a semester to pick cotton. The math teacher told him he did not expect him to take the 6 weeks test, when he returned to school. Tom insisted he take the test, and scored a 100. The teacher refused to give him an "A" on the report card, so Dad Chiles when to the school superintendant, and Tom got his "A". When Tom later asked me to be his partner in an air conditioning business, I remembered his ability in our school math class and did not hesitate to join him.

I graduated in 1939, and there was no way I could get a job in a jobless town with a population of only 800. My mother had a brother in Los Angeles, California, and it was agreed by all that I could sleep at his house, until I found a job.

My father got me a free pass on the train to L.A. and I was to send for my wife when I got a job. I can't remember the population of L.A. in 1939, but expect it was around three million. There were only five jobs openings in the Los Angeles Examiner Employment Section on the first morning I perused it for a job. Times were hard. We were still suffering the effects of the 1929 Depression. I finally found a job in Whittier, California, a suburb of East Los Angeles, working for F.W. Woolworth five and dime store at \$16 per week. I sent for my wife and I worked there about six months.

I have been lucky all my life. I was always winning raffles and things. I was lucky again when Douglas Aircraft ran an ad in the paper, and I was hired at 50 cents an hour. I was rich and got overtime at 75 cents per hour. 99% of the men were riveters. A dead-end mundane job that was very boring, but I landed employment in the experimental department from 1939 – 1943, where they did everything else. Most of the men had soon been drafted and replaced by women, but I had two draft deferments, one son born 30 days before Pearl Harbor and a job in defense industry. I knew I would not be drafted. Our department was in charge of making sure the airplanes passed inspections from the Army Air Corp, and I became a specialist at making any needed repairs with my crew of women. We now employed 100,000 people and 98% were women.

I worked every day, never turned down overtime, and accumulated a little cash and an automobile. My best friend at that time was a co-worker, Dale Pray, and we played on the Douglas All-Star Softball Team. He played first base and I played short-stop. We joined forces and set up a small jewelry manufacturing business. We had five women from Douglas who also worked for us as employees, and we worked five hours at night. We had a 4F jewelry salesman, and he sold our jewelry from San Diego to Seattle, Washington.

I was on cloud nine. Money was rolling in and it looked good for a long time. We went to all of the fine night clubs and rubbed elbows with the upper crust.

My luck cooled off, though. One morning the newspaper ran huge headlines stating all men under the age of 26 were to be drafted, regardless of draft deferments.

So, I went to a good friend, a Colonel Bates, who was responsible for the purchase of the planes. We had built up a great trust, as he knew I would never try to slide something by him. In fact, I would show and repair things the inspectors missed. He wrote me a letter glowing with praise that detailed my experience with aircraft repairs. We both felt I was a shoo-in to become an aircraft mechanic in the Army Air Corp.

At age 23 I had showed up for my military physical and presented my glorified letter, signed by Colonel Bates, and written on Army Air Corp Stationary. The draft board told me

that 13,000 men from the Army Air Corp were just transferred to the infantry a week before, and I was now Private John S. in the infantry. I was ill. I knew the infantry was the most dangerous place to be. In the meantime, we had another son born in 1943, and we named him, Don. The first boy was named, Jim.

I was sent to Little Rock, Arkansas for basic training. My family went to Borger, Texas, where my father was still a Santa Fe Railroad employee. My wife, Nell, was employed there, also, and they all lived together.

I would like to skip my short Army career, as I was in the hospital longer than I was on active duty. It was something I wanted to never re-live and tell.

I was a replacement in Guam to the 77th Infantry, Division 306 Company, after I got out of basic training. We made a beach head invasion on the island of Ie Shima, a few miles off the coast of Okinawa, about 30 days before the Okinawa invasion. I can't describe the details of that time. We had been pinned down for several days, and I learned that the famed Pulitzer Prize winning war correspondent, Earnie Pyle, was killed in a jeep on this very island.

We spent about 20 days securing the island and then were picked up by ship for a two week rest. Once back, we walked into Okinawa and spent several days fighting. My buddy, Woodrow, and I were sleeping in a 2 man foxhole on our last night there. We took turns sleeping, one for four hours, then the other four hours. I heard a noise about midnight, and before I woke Woodrow a Jap had tossed a hand grenade into our hole. It killed Woodrow and wounded me. I lobbed back two hand grenades and never heard anything after that. The next morning, as the stretcher bearers hauled me off, I saw the Jap that I had killed. I was placed on the hospital ship named, The U.S.S. Rescue and I was delivered to the Letterman General Hospital in San Francisco. I remember one night a man close to me was complaining to a nurse about me moaning in my sleep. The nurse turned on him and reprimanded him and told him I was very ill. Several weeks later I was transferred to Brooks General Hospital in San Antonio, Texas. In about six months I was transferred to Brooks Convalescent Hospital. Three months later I was given a two week leave to go home to Borger, with the understanding that I would be discharged out of the Army when I came back. The two weeks turned into two months. I was discharged with a 50% disability, due to combat fatigue. I was so glad to get home! However, I could not sleep with my wife for a while on account of thrashing with recurring nightmares and battle demons, in which I would cause her physical harm.

By now we had dropped the Atom Bomb and the war was over. I had to make a decision to go to college on the new GI Bill, or take a job where the government would supplement my pay. I decided if I went to college I would still have to find a job after four years. So I took on-the-job training. I was hired by Ben Lipshy, the brother-in-law of F. Morris Zale, the founder of Zale Jewelry. Borger, Texas was their 16th store. I started upstairs in the watch repair department. My instructor was a fine watchmaker and diamond setter. I became

very good at this trade. I sold watches at Christmas time and learned I was also good at this.

My old friend, Dale, from Douglas Aircraft visited me in Borger. He was separated from his wife. He met a well-to-do widow named, Blasingame, in Borger who wanted to leave her prior in-laws behind, and Dale had told her about our experiences making jewelry back in Los Angeles. She said she would put up the money if I could find a jewelry store for sale. I found a fine store in Carrollton, Missouri, Mitchell Jewelry. My ego had me remove the sign over the storefront and I changed the name to Stockton Jewelry. The store was a success, and I was very happy. Nell and the boys liked living over the store. The Blasingame Lady lived in an apartment, and Dale Pray went back to his wife in California. This brings us to 1949. One day Miss Blasingame said she was getting married and no longer needed my services. She bought me out. I had kept in touch with Nell's brother, Tom, I asked him to help me get to Dallas, where we were to visit Nell's parents, who had sold the farm and purchased a large home in the Lakewood area, and rented out rooms as a source of income. So, Tom came and helped me move. After a few days in Dallas, population 400,000, in 1949, I decided to work a short time, before moving on to L.A. I started working for Arthur A. Everts Jewelry on the main floor, and then in a branch store in the upscale area, Highland Park. I knew the sales volume in the Diamond Department of Neiman-Marcus exceeded both Evert stores, so I applied and got hired. My first Christmas at Neiman's, commission was over \$4000, and I purchased a new Ford Thunderbird.

I would pull Tom away on Sundays to play golf, and his wife, Helen, would get furious. One time Tom asked me to come over on a Sunday to paint his house. Would paint a while and drink a while, and then we got in a hurry. We would take a pail of paint and throw it on the wall and attempt to brush it, before it ran to the ground. What a mess! Helen could have killed both of us.

Working at Neiman's was very humbling for me on one level, because I always considered myself a smart person. I began working with and around very educated people there, and realized I was only smart around people who weren't very educated. At age 35 I was living in Lakewood and our sons, Jim and Don were going to school. I worked during the week, played golf on weekends, and Nell raised the children. I know I was not a good family man. Sure, I spent time telling the boys how to be good citizens, but I was way too selfish with my time.

Also during this time, Tom Chiles had worked up as manager of Quigley Air Conditioning. He had a plan to open his own company, but needed \$7500 and promised to pay me back in twelve months. He paid me back in five months. I watched him grow and when, in 1955, he asked me to come up with \$15,000 to buy out his partner, I jumped at the chance. I had to hock my car and borrow several thousand from another friend, but I was now a partner

of Dallas Heating and Air Conditioning Company.

I expected to see profit from day one, but after thirty days I realized something was wrong. We were both working day and night, but no profit. Our selling prices were the same as our cost. Tom and I agreed that we would up our prices, knowing we would lose half of our builders. We did lose builders, but later most came back. We fired everyone, including the secretary. The next morning one employee showed up and said we could not fire him, because he had started with Tom in 1950. We told him we could not pay him. He said it was alright and climbed into the truck. He worked for us another 30 years. We installed the systems ourselves day and sold builders by night. We would be crawling under a house, close quarters. Hot, bugs, etc, and Tom would say, "John, wouldn't you rather be back at Neiman's wearing a suit and tie in the air conditioning?" I never had a moment of doubt that we would make it.

Our hard work paid off and in 1962 we were running 30 trucks and the company had saved over \$100,000. I saw my chance and I suggested we save our money and invest into apartments, remembering that landlord and that drove the only new 1933 Chevy in Amarillo.

Tom, being a member of the Shriners Lodge, became buddies with Bill Pardue, who later became potentate of the Shriners Lodge. Tom made a deal with him to build and the land was purchased. In 1962 we all partnered together and built our first complex, and soon followed that with another. Tom and I built more apartments together

I was set financially for life, and I knew it.

A few years later I was getting a divorce from wife number two, and I met my present wife, Alice. I had known her from on the phone for several years. I would call her when I needed office help. She was in charge of a large employment agency. I called her one day looking for a computer operator. After stating the salary, she kidded that she would take the job. I was kidding with her and I said, "Well, I have to look you over." She said, "Come on over to my office. It's only two blocks from yours." This was the start that led to our long marriage. We went to lunch one time. I called her several weeks later and asked if she would like to see a fancy show, and for her to wear her best dress. I was late picking her up and she looked like a million bucks. I took her to a hamburger joint. I expected her to write me off, but she kept her cool. A week later I called and invited her to see Johnny Mathis, appearing at the Pyramid Room in the Fairmont Hotel. We saw the show and started dating. She later told me that she did not think we were going to that show.

I had stopped drinking once, and then started again, and I would never have stopped drinking for good, if it had not been for Alice. I was having a terrible time, not knowing I was an alcoholic, because I didn't know what an alcoholic was, but I realized I had found a wonderful girl and I was not going to lose her to excessive drinking.

I think in the beginning Alice really felt sorry for me. She asked me to visit her parents and two brothers in their home outside of Tyler, Tx. When dinner was completed I stood up and stated to all, "I have an announcement. Alice does not know this, but I am going to marry her, with your permission." Alice turned very pale and stated, "I'm not marrying you, or anyone else." We got married September 30, 1972 and spent our honeymoon in Hawaii.

She wanted to continue working, but I said, "No." Being in the home building business, I suggested to her that we sell the house, build one, sell it, also, and by then we would build her dream house. We sold the house and all the furniture and wall paintings. We built a house around the corner. It was a beautiful house on two acres, a tennis court and filled with very fine new furniture. We had been living there two months and one evening, while Alice was out, there was a knock on the door. There stood a Chinese man, his wife, a baby and their two year old child. He introduced himself as Dr. Ku. His office was in Lewisville and he asked if we would be interested in selling. I said, "Come on in." I wasn't interested in selling that soon, but I quoted a very high price and that didn't scare him away. How Alice fits in . . . she gets back home and I can see she is very upset seeing the baby spit on her beautiful new furniture, but before she could say anything, I nudged her and said, "Dr. Ku wants to buy our house." They not only purchased the house and all the furniture and paintings, but also the silverware, sheets, pillows, televisions and towels. All they had to move in were their clothes. We became good friends and remain so today. Next we purchased a four acre lot down the street and designed our dream house. The living room was 52 feet long with a huge entry, all glass across the back, and a tennis court. We moved in in the Fall of 1976. When we got married I knew that Alice was not totally sold on the idea of loving me. I told her in the beginning I needed someone to play with and travel. It wasn't long until we really bonded, and our love for each other is the strongest. I remember we were at the World's Fair one time after we married, and she needed to go to the restroom. We were on the 2nd floor balcony that looked over the first floor of the building we were in. I looked down and saw Alice walking across the rotunda to the restroom and thought to myself, "I really love this woman." It was the first time I knew what I felt was so very real.

The single most trait that attracted me to Alice was she was always agreeable. She was receptive to my affectionate inclinations and to other things, too. I remember we were once driving from Dallas to Lewisville and I said, "Alice, let's go to Las Vegas". She said, "Today?" I said, "Today." She said, "Okay, hurry home so we can pack." Our marriage from day one was great, and it still is all these years later.

I was hooked on Nascar Racing. I saw every Daytona 500 for 22 years straight. So, when Alice and I married in the Fall of 1972, we went to Florida to see the race, and then to Disneyworld. One year it was raining at the Indy 500, and they decided to cancel the race. We came home and later the tv announcer said, "They're running at the Indy." We

hurriedly flew back to see the race, and saw it to the finish. Alice was as addicted as I was. We were at the Indy race in about 1982, and I overheard Alice say to someone that she, “. . . sure would like to have the Pace Car.”, a 1982 Cadillac convertible. When back in Dallas, I had my two year old Cadillac in for a minor repair and noticed a particular Cadillac convertible on the sales floor. I had purchased several cars in the past from one salesman, and I asked him, “Do you have a fancy price on that car? If not, I’ll buy it right now.” He said they were ready to sell it. I failed to mention that on the dash board was a plaque stating that, “This car is a replica of the Indy 500 Pace Car.” I drove it home and asked Alice to go look in the garage.

I wanted to learn to snow ski. I had water skied for many years. I took Alice to a high dollar ski shop and purchased a knockout ski outfit. She looked like she was flying down hill standing still.

Our first ski lesson was during two weeks at Vail. We both became hooked and in the years to follow, we skied all the resorts in west America, Portillo, Chile, Switzerland, Austria and Italy. We would leave Dallas January 2nd and stay all winter in resorts like Vail and Beaver Creek. We skied the pretty days and would sightsee the bad days. One heck of a wonderful life. Like I always say, “I have been truly blessed.” We have a gallon of Nastar medals, most of them gold. I could keep up with Alice on the race course, until the final year we skied with the Dallas Ski Club. That year she not only won 1st place, but also beat every man. I never fell below 3rd place in my age bracket in the state of Texas. We have a letter from Nastar to Alice stating she should try out for the Olympic team. We had a total of one year on the slopes over a 10 year span.

Summers we spent Europe, with Alan Getz and his wife. We would rent a car and travel for weeks at a time. We also sailed down a river in Germany. We visited the Greek islands. We did the same in Mexico.

All my life I had small depressions lasting two to four days, then they would go away for two to four months. I learned to live with them. I did not worry, because they always went away. Around 1990 I had one and it would not go away. After a year I decided to end the pain forever. I tried to do so. That very day, Alice was coming home from Dallas, and she called the maid to check on me, something she had never done before. The maid found me in the tractor garage boarded up with a tractor running, and I started incoherently telling her how to settle our estate.

At his point Alice took over. She sent me three times to treatment centers, and she encouraged me unceasingly. When I was in the hospital full of misery, my name would come over the intercom to report to the office. The secretary would give me a note from Alice telling me how much she loved me. This kept me going. I first went to AA while in a treatment center.

I always thought you went to AA for drinking or drug abuse. What I found out is the program was a way to live. I learned a way to live with God in my life for the first time. I have now gone 22 years and had not even a small depression.

We've had some real bad times; our house burned down, Alice had breast cancer, I had a rock fly into my good eye and I can no longer drive or play golf. But life is good. I can see well enough to read and write and watch television, and go to AA meetings. Alice has survived cancer after two operations, and she has a fun social life.

No way I can tell my life's story in these pages, at age 89. Little did I know that God looked over me all my life, and what I couldn't do for myself, He would do it for me. For 10 years I have prayed every single night, thanking Him and praying for His will and the power to carry it out. These things I learned living with Alice and the AA program.

I spend most of my time helping young alcoholics to become good solid citizens and do the right thing. I pray that God forgives me for the way I lived the first fifty years and to please judge me by my actions since then.

If I have a worry now, it is only my concern for Alice after I am gone. She is so very generous and wishes to leave money to the breast cancer fund in Dallas, and I told her to, "Go for it."

There are only a few things I would change if I had my life to re-live. I never could understand why my grandchildren never came to see me. I expect they were told of my first fifty years and not the last forty. Maybe I will see them in the next life. I KNOW I will see Alice, because her faith is as strong as mine.

John Benner Stockton, January 1, 2001

p.s. So blessed. I left out that we are close friends to our house builder and his wife. They have twin girls, Jamie and Jordan. We have kept them from the time they were tiny things. They have stayed with us many many nights. They consider us as "Dallas" grandparents, and we cherish our times together.

We regret they're unable to be in attendance with us today. The girls' grandfather, Duane's, father is critically ill and they had to leave for Kansas yesterday morning, in order to be with him. They came to see Alice on Christmas Eve and the girls, now in their teens, had created a beautiful memorial presentation in John's memory, and it was very moving. Their unconditional love was cherished by John and Alice is grateful for their involvement in their lives.

John Benner Stockton, WWII Veteran, of Dallas, passed away December 20, 2016. He was born February 5, 1920. A celebration of John's life will take place 1:00 PM Monday, December 26, 2016 at the Caudle-Rutledge-Daugherty Funeral Home in Lindale. The visitation begins prior to the service at 12:00 PM. Memorials may be sent to the National Kidney Foundation: <https://www.kidney.org/offices/nkf-serving-north-texaswest-texas> 5429 LBJ Freeway, Suite 250, Dallas, TX 75240.

Cemetery

Harris Creek Cemetery

14037 County Road 336

Tyler, TX, 75708

Events

DEC **Visitation** 12:00PM - 01:00PM

26

Caudle-Rutledge-Daugherty Funeral Home
206 W. South St., Lindale, TX, US, 75771

DEC **Chapel service** 01:00PM - 02:00PM

26

Caudle-Rutledge-Daugherty Funeral Home
206 W. South St., Lindale, TX, US, 75771

Comments



“ The Pardue Family purchased the Sentiments of Serenity Spray for the family of John Benner Stockton.



The Pardue Family - December 23, 2016 at 10:34 AM