

Jack Rainey Memorial

Remarks by Former Congressman Rod Chandler

April 6, 2019

I first want to thank the Rainey family for inviting me to share some memories of a man I deeply admired and respected. I am honored by your request.

Jack Rainey came to La Grande in 1955. He coached summer baseball leagues that first year and it was there I met him. Right away I noticed that signature crewcut – always a Marine I guess. He had a warm and inviting smile. He was in charge but he put you at ease. He was a coach and a teacher who stressed the positive, recognizing the good play or the effort in class. He never engaged in those “in-your-face-rants” we see from many coaches. He let you know he believed in you. As my friend Buck Corey says, “He was demanding but fair. He was a leader.”

When I posted a notice of Mr. Rainey’s passing on Facebook I was delighted by the warm remembrances I received from classmates. He touched the lives of so many young men and women and they remember him fondly. Here is a sample:

Monte King said, “He was an awesome teacher who had all of our respect.”

Greg Blackman played American Legion Baseball the summers of 1958 and 1959 under Coach Rainey. He wrote, “We had a great team and a coach who cared about each player ... (who) was passionate about playing the game the right way... He taught us to be young men and that there was honor in winning and playing hard. Our team thought the world of him and all of us are better citizens and productive individuals because of Coach Rainey.”

Katie Fitzgerald Curtis remembered Mr. Rainey as “One of my two all-time favorite teachers. He set the standard for excellence and brought the best out of us.”

My classmate John Lyell recalled the practical lessons he learned in Mr. Rainey’s class. “He taught us what we needed for life. How to balance a check book, how to prepare tax returns and on and on.”

Mark Gruelich admired his beautiful handwriting and recalled, with fondness, how Mr. Rainey would often end a statement with the phrase, “...and various things of that nature.”

Lonnie Myers said he was inspired to serve 27 years as a United States Marine by Mr. Rainey. Lonnie wrote, “He (also) encouraged me to go into coaching (Legion Baseball and Golf) and teaching Middle School Social Studies.” Lonnie served two tours in Vietnam and retired as a full colonel. He completed his career as a teacher in La Grande.

Another classmate, Connie Jepsen Kleen earned a PhD and went on to teach English in college including, for a time, in Germany. She said, “In the fall of 1963, I student taught at La

Grande High School where Mr. Rainey guided me in teaching one of his Modern Problems courses. To tell the truth, I was actually afraid of him. Despite my fear, I survived...I greatly appreciated what I learned from him." Connie goes on to say, "One of my favorite quotations is 'To teach is to touch a lifetime forever.' And so it is with Jack Rainey who not only touched our lives, but enriched them all."

And finally, I know you will love this one: Deanna Talbott Brickman remembered, "He helped pull me out of a locker that I was stuffed in by some upper classmen."

I believe that Jack Rainey had the greatest influence on young lives as a coach. In the 1959-1960 basketball season at La Grande, Mr. Rainey guided our team to a berth in the Oregon State High School tournament in Eugene. We honored him with a 20 win and 2 loss regular season record and we won one of three games at the state tournament. For all of us on that team, I believe we took from that winter's experience life-lessons that have served us to this day.

In 2012, I was moved to write Mr. Rainey a letter expressing my appreciation for the inspiration he had been to me. I think a few lines from that letter might best describe my feelings for this fine man that we honor today. Quoting that letter:

"You worked tirelessly to help us learn to play our positions and to execute when it came time for games. Buck Corey and I spoke one day recently about that 1959-1960 Tiger team and we agreed that you got from each of us far more basketball than we ever dreamt we had.

"By the time I was in my forties (and a member of the United States House of Representatives)..., it was not terribly important that I know how to block for a rebound or bounce pass to an open teammate. It was critical, however, to understand that preparation, hard work and hustle would more often than not result in success. Prepare, work hard and hustle was a life's lesson I learned, most of all, from you.

"Through all the years of my career, one that has been enormously exciting and satisfying, I have had the benefit of your encouragement and life lessons from the basketball court and classroom. When I was honored in 1999 at Oregon State University, as a University Fellow, I was thrilled that you came to witness the presentation. More than any other teacher or coach I wanted you to be there. I hope you were as proud as I was because you had a lot to do with my receiving that honor."

I am so glad I sent him that letter.

There are some white-haired, gimpy kneed former Jack Rainey students and players here today and hundreds more around the country. We all owe him a great deal for what he did for us, but I think it goes even beyond that.

As I thought about Lonnie Myers, the 27 year Marine, coach and middle school teacher, I wondered how many young lives Mr. Rainey touched **through Lonnie**.

Connie Jepsen was an English teacher but she learned that craft, in great measure, from Mr. Rainey. Students of hers were surely influenced, through Connie, by Mr. Rainey as well.

Buck Corey led young men into combat as an Army officer in Vietnam. I know Buck very well. He took to heart those Jack Rainey lessons of PREPARE, WORK HARD, HUSTLE AND LEAD.

Bob Robeson, another teammate, flew over 900 helicopter medivac missions in Vietnam – shot down twice and his aircraft riddled with bullets seven times. Because of Bob’s courage and leadership, over 25-hundred wounded were brought safely from battle zones.

I have no doubt that young men and women who never heard of Jack Rainey have excelled in life because he influenced them through **his** students and players. It is surely intended to be that way. We are all given the chance to serve. Jack Rainey certainly made the most of his opportunity.

One of my favorite quotations from the Bible is from Mark 1:11.

“...A voice came out of the heavens: “You are My beloved Son, in you I am well pleased.”

I believe our teacher, coach, mentor and friend is in a better place. I also believe his Heavenly Father said to him as well, “...in you I am well pleased.”

God bless you, Mr. Rainey and thank you.