

## **2005 Festival Dedication**

### **JOSEPH MARSHALL, LCDR. USN RET.**

What is the measure of a man? Is it something measured by strength? Is it stamina? Is it perseverance? Is it the amount accomplished during the short time we are on this planet? Where do things like generosity, commitment, compassion, inspiration and leadership factor in? What about the unique and singular impact one human being can have on another?

My father, Joseph Marshall, is not only my inspiration, but he has been my friend for as long as I can remember. At 88, he still gives me pause and I find there is much I can still learn from him.

His story seems so prototypical American: a self-made man who built a life, created a family and established his own unique identity. His biological father was killed in a freak accident when he was less than a year old, creating economic hardship for his mother and her children. My father did not grow up with a silver spoon, but instead went to work at the age of twelve, bringing in whatever money he could for the family. From clearing the package chutes at a Montgomery Wards in downtown Baltimore, to odd jobs for merchants near West Cross Street, to helping clean out the Columbia Theatre after each show, he was driven and intent on helping his family. At the age of 17, he left home and joined the US Navy. He went in as an enlisted, but through determination and a vision for himself, he climbed the ranks. He achieved his high school equivalency then two years of college credits. By 1940, he was a commissioned officer, what was called a "mustang" in those days. His promotions coming through merit and hard work. During WWII, he was a deep sea diver and arrived two days after the bombing at Pearl. His job was the retrieval of bodies trapped below the sunken decks of the strafed fleet.

At the end of the War, he married my mother, Viola Beck, who traveled from Washington, DC to San Francisco, CA to meet him at the dock as his ship pulled in. Their union lasted 57 years.

It's funny what you remember about growing up. I know that I used to be scared of my dad when I was a child. He seemed so determined, forceful, strong. He was someone who commanded respect and you listened and did what he said. As I grew older, I began to appreciate his quirky sense of humor and how much he had provided for his small family. To say he was selfless only touches on a small fragment of his level of dedication. His family was his life and while he loved his work, family always came first: It's a lesson I've held onto over the years.

Funny how our values ebb and flow in modern society. Courtesy, generosity, kindness, care, compassion, commitment, and honor seem to be elastic values that alter on need and agenda. For my dad, they have been rock solid and steadfast. I was taught that your word was your bond; that your good name is the most important thing you have in your life. I was taught that honor and its maintenance, made you a person of substance and that there

were rights and wrongs where you always treated others the way you would want to be treated. Wiggleroom in the realm of personal honor did not exist. I was taught that you always spoke your truth, but you did so with respect to other's feelings.

It's funny as I try to find a word or expression to describe my dad. He is a gentleman in the old-fashioned sense. He is opinionated, generous, caring, stubborn, funny, determined, charming, and a whole slew of adjectives that only touch on a piece of who he is. I know that I would not be the person I am today if it weren't for him (with my Mom) and I have long known how blessed I was to have him as my Dad.

When I founded Flickers 24 years ago, he was there by my side supporting and advising me. When RIIF started nine years ago, he took an active part in film selection and was a sounding board for what would eventually make our organization what it is today. In my own life as I faced some hard personal decisions from loss to growth; he was there helping me achieve balance with perspective. And, this past spring, he was there as we raised funds for the Friends of the Columbus Theatre to spur the restoration of this historic building. Come to think of it, my Dad has always been there for me.

Dedicating this ninth season of RIIF to Joseph Marshall could not be more fitting and appropriate. I am so grateful to be his son and thank him for the love he has given me and the love he has taught and helped me to give.