

JAMES BORN

A LEGACY OF FAITH & HOW HE USED BERKS COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

PLEASE NOTE:

James Born passed away January 5, 2017. This article was written in 2015.

Before he passed, Jim worked with Berks County Community Foundation to establish The James. P. Born, Sr. Fund so he could easily make charitable donations, such as providing Christmas presents to children at Mary's Shelter. When he passed away, his estate went to the fund in his name and to another fund, The Lucy M. Born Fund, in honor of his wife.

Jim was an active volunteer until not long before he died at age 91.

"If you've heard the maxim 'The proper attitude is gratitude,' you should know that this guy is the embodiment of that," said Terry Dugan, business manager at St. Ignatius Loyola Church in Whitfield.

2015 ARTICLE

**By Jason Brudereck, Director of Communication,
Berks County Community Foundation**

When James and Lucy Born invited a family friend into their home, they couldn't have known what was about to happen.

By 2011, they had gotten to know their son's friend well enough that they felt comfortable letting him fix a problem with their computer. He worked on it on the second floor of their home in the Stone Hill Farms development in Spring Township.

When the man said he was finished, Jim sat down at the computer to take a look.

The man was standing behind Jim when he suddenly smashed a hammer down on the older man's head. And then he laughed.

"I turned around and I said, 'That hurt. What's funny about it?' and I guess I was yelling," Jim said recently as he retold the story with his eyes closed.

The man hit Jim several more times while Lucy came running up the stairs. Jim had collapsed to the floor by the time the man struck Lucy with the hammer. She fell on top of Jim, who had passed out.

BUILDING A FAMILY AND A CHURCH



James P. Born Sr. was born March 17, 1925 in Lebanon, Pa. When he was 12, the family moved to Reading, where Jim attended Northwest Middle School. He wanted to continue on to Reading High, but his father insisted that his son attend Central Catholic High School.

“He didn’t like the way I was growing up without a Catholic education,” Jim said with a wry smile on his face.

Upon graduating from Central Catholic in 1943, he went to St. Charles Borromeo Seminary just outside of Philadelphia to study for the priesthood. But, after three years, that was enough for Jim.

“I decided it was not really the place for me,” Jim said. “I felt God wanted me to do something else. So I left the seminary and a week later I was in the United States Navy.”

He was a ship’s photographer assigned to Naval Station Great Lakes in Illinois. After a few years, he was discharged as a seaman second class and enrolled at Gettysburg College, where he graduated in 1950 with a degree in business administration.

He went on to work for decades in insurance and real estate in the Reading area.



Toward the start of his career, he met Lucy Mae Wolff on a blind date.

“I took one look at her and knew that was the girl I was going to marry,” he said. “I was so impressed with her. We were like two magnets.”

In 1952, they married at St. Paul’s Roman Catholic Church in Reading. For two years, they tried to have a child.

“We were very fortunate when Lucy did get pregnant,” Jim recalled. “We were so elated. But the next thing you know, she had a miscarriage. I think I must have cried that whole night. I was upset, but that’s not why I was crying. I felt sorry for her. She just wanted to be a mother so badly.”

Worn out from frustration and heartbreak, they decided to adopt. They did so twice. Their son, James Patrick, was born July 2, 1960. Their daughter, Mary Louise, was born April 5, 1962. They were devastated when she died from lymphoma at age 4 on June 11, 1966.

Jim coped by occupying himself with religion. The Diocese of Allentown was establishing a new parish by breaking off some members of Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church in West Reading.

On June 1, 1965, Jim became one of the founding members of the new parish known as St. Ignatius Loyola, which at first held Sunday Mass in the West Lawn Fire Company before the current church and school were built on St. Albans Drive in Whitfield.

Jim worked hard to raise money for the building project and donated his own money as well.

“I did whatever they needed,” Jim said.

“WE GAVE HIM A FAMILY”

The Borns enjoyed many years of helping at the church and they had decades of joy with their son.

“Jimmy was the type who felt sorry for people,” his father recalled. “He had a family and he felt sorry for people who didn’t have a close family.”

That was true of one friend of Jimmy’s in particular.

“We gave him a family life and we were happy to do it,” Jim said.

But then came that day in 2011 when that friend attacked Jim and Lucy in their home.

When Jim regained consciousness, his wife’s lifeless body was on top of him. An official with the Berks County coroner’s office later told Jim that Lucy had likely died within five minutes of the attack because of the brutal nature of her wounds.

“As I drifted in and out of consciousness, I could hear the man going through the house,” Jim said.

Eventually, it was quiet. Jim felt woozy and believed it would be unsafe to attempt to walk, so he slowly worked his way down the stairs while remaining sitting. He opened his front door on that windy day and began yelling, “Help! Help! Help!”

A neighbor soon heard Jim and called police. With information about the assailant from Jim and Lucy’s son, it did not take police long to find the attacker.

He was never able to articulate why he did it. He only said that he had “snapped.” The man, who had a history of mental illness, was sentenced to 30 to 60 years in state prison for the attacks.

After Lucy’s murder, Jim and his son grew exceptionally close.

“Jimmy was always a good boy but I think he took real pity on me knowing how much I missed his mom,” Jim said. “And he missed her, too.”

Sadly, as he and his son began forging a renewed bond, his son suddenly passed away. James P. Born Jr., 52, died March 30, 2013, of a heart attack in his Laureldale home.

“I still have a voice message from Jimmy,” Jim said. “It’s my last vestige of my son who became so close to me.”

The elder Jim Born carries on. He now lives at The Highlands at Wyomissing.

Not long ago, he approached Berks County Community Foundation for help structuring his charitable giving. “I needed some guidance,” Jim said.

A fund in Jim’s name has been set up at the Community Foundation to assist efforts that appeal to him, such as providing Christmas presents to children at Mary’s Shelter and supporting Catholic education. Another fund in Lucy’s name will eventually be created from Jim’s estate.

At age 90, he still volunteers regularly in the office at St. Ignatius.

“If you’ve heard the maxim ‘The proper attitude is gratitude,’ you should know that this guy is the embodiment of that,” said Terry Dugan, business manager at St. Ignatius.

His faith keeps Jim strong, despite significant tragedies in his life. “If I can still help others, then I’m still making a difference,” Jim said. “That’s just what I’ve always done.”

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