A TRIBUTE TO JOHN R. CRANFORD

By Linda Reed, Laurie MacDougall, Carol Murphy, Katheryn Cranford, Roger Cranford, and Justin MacDougall

John (Jack) Ringer Cranford came into the world on March 3, 1922 in Washington D.C. He was the youngest son of Walter Wilson and Selma Delle (Hout) Cranford. Jack lived on Rhode Island Avenue in Washington with his three older brothers, Wilson Hout, Howard Lemen, and Leonard Carter Cranford. Jack always hated his middle name. He was named for Pastor Ringer, a friend of his parents. Wilson and Howard got their middle names from family names, Delle’s maiden name, Hout, and her mother’s maiden name, Lemen. It has also been said that the family was descended from the Carter’s of Virginia.

Jack grew up, the baby of four boys. He remembered doing his homework at his mother’s big oak table with the ball and claw feet. The family often visited relatives in Lorton, Virginia. He had a pet dog named Bozo. He told the story of how one time his family left Bozo to fend for himself while the family was away visiting relatives. They set out a bowl of dog food for every day they would be away, naively thinking that Bozo would discipline himself to eat one a day like any sensible cat would do! When they returned, they found that he had eaten every bowl on the first day and made himself sick.

One of Jack’s fondest memories was working at Yellowstone National Park with his buddies during the summers. He told many funny stories of incidents that happened in the park. He worked in a gas station with a set of rims. They were constantly playing jokes on customers who did not know there were two of them. And one day a woman came into the station with a serious problem. She wanted to know how she could preserve the bear tracks on her car.

After graduating from Mckinley High School about 1939 (?), Jack joined the Coast Guard at the end of World War II and became a Pharmacist Mate. Jack was stationed with the Coast Guard in New Jersey. Many years later, when he and his first wife, Mary, visited the station, the captain learned that he had served there, so he took the flag down from the station and presented it to Jack. This is the flag that draped his casket today.

Jack was too young to see any real fighting, but his two older brothers did. Wilson enlisted in the air branch of the Marine Corps and earned an appointment to the Naval Academy in Annapolis, graduating in the highly honored class of 1938. He was accepted at Pensacola Flight School and soon was thrilled to have the honor of wearing his Navy Wings. Wilson survived a 20 year career in the Navy, serving in both WWII and the Korean War. He served on the USS Marblehead where he was wounded in action during the Battle of the Flores Sea and received the Purple Heart medal. He also served on the USS Intrepid as Damage Control Officer during the Battle of Leyte Gulf. He also served on the Quincy and the Luzon. Wilson made it safely through the war and lived into his eighty’s, being buried at Arlington. Leonard was not so fortunate. Jack lost his next older brother when, at the age of 24, as a pilot in the U.S. Army Air Corp, his plane crashed and all eight aboard were killed. Leonard is buried at Arlington, also. His brother Howard graduated from Wilson Teacher’s College and taught in the public school system until his retirement. One of the most stirring family memories is of Howard, singing by recording at his own funeral in his beautiful tenor voice, Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled. All four brothers proudly served their country in different ways, all with a
deep sense of patriotism. Together, they have left a distinguished heritage for their children and grandchildren.

After the war, Jack got his degree from George Washington University in Speech, an apt major, as he was a very outgoing person who could talk to anyone anywhere. He graduated in the class of 1950, the same class as Jacqueline Lee Bouvier Kennedy Onassis who graduated with a BA in French Literature. Years later he was invited to attend a reception for the class in honor of Jackie Kennedy.

Jack often told the story of riding on the bus, sitting behind a pretty girl whose dark hair glistened in the sun when the light fell on her red highlights. He eventually met her at a sorority party where a mutual friend introduced them. Mary majored in Art Appreciation at George Washington where they both attended. Jack married Mary Martha Rupert on August 5, 1950 at St. Paul’s United Methodist church in Chevy Chase, MD.

Jack’s first love was Geology, but GW had no major in Geology. So he contented himself with collecting rocks and minerals - his lifetime hobby. He was a member of the Mineralogical Society of Washington D.C. for many years. He used to entertain the neighborhood kids with his flexible sandstone, coprolites (fossilized dinosaur dung!), and the water trapped inside a geode! One of his daughter, Linda’s, favorite memories was a trip to the ruby mine in North Carolina where she found a ruby at the age of 5. Dad had it cut for her and she still has the ring. His other daughter, Laurie, has a ruby ring, with the stone found by her father on one of the family trips.

Jack and his brother, Howard, both sang in the Singing Capital Chorus, the District of Columbia Chapter of Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Barber Shop Quartet Singing in America, Inc. (SPEBSQSA), for many years. His brother, Howard, named their chapter. They had a love of music. He and Howard sang in many Harvest of Harmony shows at Constitution Hall. He and Mary sang in the John Baloue Singers (spelling?), performing on the radio, making a record, and singing at various events. Jack sang in the choir in St. John’s Methodist church and in the Senior Saints for many years.

Jack’s nieces, Carol Murphy and Katheryn Cranford, and nephew, Roger Cranford, remember many fond things about their uncle. He was nick-named eagle eye because he could find a four-leaf clover anywhere. He could make a blade of grass “sing.” Carol remembers one Thanksgiving dinner with her beloved Uncle Jack. He was balancing forks and other things on his nose. And he was making the water glasses “sing.” She crawled under the ball and claw table to find all the old bubblegum put there by four boys doing their homework. They remember that Uncle Jack would often stop the car to pick up specimens for his rock collection. He always had rocks in his pockets or was finding a new specimen for his collection. He made rock collections with labels for Carol’s children, Mike, Shane, and Annie. He once went to nursery school with Annie where they made a cloth print. Annie got into an argument with a boy about who had the best uncle. He took Carol’s family to Calvert Cliffs to hunt for sharks teeth and Mike and Brendan to hunt for rubies in North Carolina. Carol remembers Uncle Jack looking for arrowheads at Cranford church during the annual Cranford reunion picnic or hunting for mica in a farmer’s field in Richmond VA. Uncle Jack could play Moonlight Sonata on the piano and make it sound wonderful - until he came to the last note he knew of it! She remembers that Uncle Jack was constantly running into people he knew, long lost relatives or friends, or discovering a mutual acquaintance while conversing with
someone he just met. He was truly fun loving, never boring.

They all miss their Uncle Jack, dearest, funniest uncle ever, and of course, only such a uniquely wonderful uncle could have brought them two such wonderful aunts, Mary and Polly. In loving remembrance, Katheryn Lee Cranford, John and Carol Cranford Murphy, Michael Howard and Shane Joseph Murphy, and Annie Katheryn Murphy Warren, whose husband Jonathan and daughter, Alison, sadly never got to know Uncle Jack.

Jack and Mary had two daughters, Sarah Linda and Laurie Jean. Linda married John Anthony Reed on May 11, 1991 at Cranford Methodist Church at Lorton, VA, the church built by Jack's grandfather, James Cranford. Laurie married David Donald MacDougall on August 18, 1978 at Wesley United Methodist church in Alexandria, VA.


The characteristics that Justin MacDougall will forever remember about his grandfather were his incredible generosity, his never ending patience, and his strong faith. He helped to inspire Justin to study, and to desire and seek a career in science. As a result Justin graduated with a B.S. in Biological Life Sciences from North Carolina State University in 2007.

After Mary died of a long illness in 1991, Jack married Mary (Polly) Knox Blandford on December 2, 2000. Jack and Polly were active in their respective churches, attending the Mineralogical Society banquets, singing in the Senior Saints, and enjoying get-togethers with family and friends. Polly still lives in Rockville. She has a son, Clark Adams in Charlottesville, VA, a granddaughter, Alexis Gerard, and three great-grand children, Katie, Emily, and Peter in Germantown, MD.

Linda and Laurie will forever be grateful for their Dad. He was a father who was gentle, kind, and loving. He always provided for his family but had resources to give away to others. Linda remembers as a child seeing her Grandfather, Walter Cranford, and Dad fighting over who was going to pay the bill at the restaurant or who was going to take the cash someone donated, each trying to pay or give the money to the other. He took his family on wonderful trips out West to the Grand Canyon, to Colorado to see Uncle Don and Aunt Aleen, to Niagara Falls, camping trips, agate hunting in the Painted Desert, to the Outer Banks or Hatteras, N.C., to Ocean City, picnics at Skyline Drive, or hunting for rubies and emeralds in North Carolina.

One of Linda’s fondest memories is of the old cow skull and her Dad’s reaction to it. While looking for agates in the Painted Desert, Linda, age 16, who wanted to be a paleontologist or archeologist, came across an old cow skull, bleached white in the sun, lying on the desert. She was very thrilled and excited by such a “find!” But Dad was not so pleased with the idea of putting this disgusting bone in his car. He told her absolutely not, leave it right there. Well, this could not be borne by a budding scientist, so the skull was secretly put into a paper bag and squirreled away in the back seat. Several days later, while cleaning out the car in a camp ground, Dad came across a brown paper bag. When he opened it, he cried out in disgust,
“Mary, look what those kids brought!” Mom burst into laughter. After a few seconds, a sheepish grin crossed his face. Linda has the old cow skull to this day.

To our husband, father, uncle, grandfather, and friend—We will be forever grateful for your kind loving ways. We all miss your smiling face. But we know that we will see you again in the presence of our Heavenly Father, who sent His son, Jesus, to die in our place, so that we can spend eternity with Him and with each other.

March 3, 1922 – September 20, 2010