

## **Bob Burnside, About Chief “Bud” Stevenson**

*I had been asked by Richard Mark, the author of this journal of the Los Angeles County Lifeguards, to write a few words about Chief “Bud” Stevenson. I pondered his request and came to the conclusion that it would be impossible to “write just a few words” about this amazing man if the term “A Legend” is to be fully understood and appreciated by present and future generations of Los Angeles County Lifeguards, and also by Lifeguards nationally. Chief Bud Stevenson was “One Above All,” and his early vision for our future became his lifetime priority.*

*Things most Lifeguards now take for granted, such as our safety series retirement, salaries comparable to police and fire departments (or at least aligned with similar public safety agencies), paramedic certification, scuba recovery units, rescue boats, and most of the modern pieces of rescue equipment and established policies might have never been realized if not envisioned and fought for by Bud.*

*With little educational background, he rose to the position of Chief Lifeguard from the very earliest days of the county Lifeguards. He served in the merchant marines during World War II and became captain in 1948 and chief in 1957. From his early years as a Lifeguard he was constantly troubled by the placement of the Lifeguard division under the County Parks and Recreation. He envisioned that all beach Lifeguards should be administered by similar safety service agencies, not recreational administrators. His vision of a separate Department of Beaches, retirement and salary parity with the LA County Sheriffs and Fire Departments became an obsession with him. More importantly, he was determined to see it come about in his lifetime. He spent years supporting political figures, with the hope that they would eventually support his visions for us. Bud traveled to Sacramento year after year, struggling to get legislation passed on our behalf. Finally, through his direct efforts, legislation was passed to allow LA County Lifeguards to enter the safety series retirement.*

*Lifeguards elsewhere had the same concerns, yet had lacked the capability to overcome the problem. His success allowed other Lifeguard services throughout California to similarly qualify for the better retirement benefits. The years ahead would see this achievement benefit Lifeguards nationally.*

*The LA County 4th District Supervisor, Burton Chace, whom we had supported for many years and who had a deep respect for Bud, made the motion at an appropriate time to establish the Department of Beaches. The motion passed, and Lifeguards were no longer under the administration of the Parks and Recreation Department.*

*Bud was a true idealist, visionary, and keen politician. He had no egotistical traits, never sought recognition, nor did he enjoy being in the limelight. His dreams were not just for LA County Lifeguards, but for all Lifeguards. Recognizing that “the chain was only as strong as its weakest link,” he worked*

### **“The Journey”**

Smooth sailing we say! to you Chief.  
Safely across the reef,  
Oh, the wisdom you taught  
those battles you fought -  
that now . . . have become our belief.

Have a good journey! my friend  
With you, our love we send.  
Such wonderful years  
the laughter - the tears  
yet all . . . such a perfect blend.

Sadly your ship leaves our bay.  
Alone with your thoughts, we stay  
always to cherish,  
never to perish,  
God Willing . . . again some day

*Yesterday, a long-time “lifeguard buddy” passed away – for him I write these lines.*

*Bob Burnside*

*diligently to promote the concept of consolidating all Lifeguards in Los Angeles County under one department, with all sharing the same benefits.*

*Before his retirement, he saw all of his early visions for us completed. With little fanfare, he retired, yet kept his finger on the pulse of his "family" until his death.*

*With his guidance and full support, the establishment of the present United States Lifesaving Association, the consolidation of LA City and Santa Monica Lifeguards into the Department of Beaches, safety series retirement, and salary parity can all be directly attributed to his lifetime dedication to us all.*

*Here is a closing story that best describes Bud. In 1993, Bud had been retired for some years and lived near me in Palm Desert. During lunch one day, he expressed concern about pain in his shoulders and feeling weak. We had been discussing a problem that the Lifeguards were having politically and he, as he did so often, was expressing what they needed to do to resolve their dilemma. I became concerned, noticing the apparent uncomfortable pain in his shoulder as he drank bourbon and seven, his favorite afternoon cocktail.*

*"Bud," I said, "I have a friend at the Eisenhower radiology department. Let me call him and get you in to see what the hell is wrong."*

*After much debate he agreed and I picked him up a few days later and took him to the hospital to be x-rayed. That evening my radiologist friend called me at home and advised me that Bud had cancer that had spread throughout his shoulder and beyond and would likely die within two months.*

*The next day I called Bud to have lunch with me. He joked, "Okay, but it's going to be Mexican food." I agreed.*

*We had finished our margaritas, and I inquired of him, "You haven't asked me about the results of the test. Are you interested?"*

*He replied, "Well maybe after lunch, let's get back to this Lifeguard problem," and he continued throwing out ideas for the crew to consider.*

*Finally, I stopped him and said, "I've got some news that you must hear now."*

*"Okay, knucklehead," (a term he always laid on me), "what did the doc say?" I told him, "Cancer, and you don't have much time left."*

*Without a flicker of emotion the next words out of his mouth were, "I think we need to go to Los Angeles next week and talk to Supervisor Kenneth Hahn about this Lifeguard problem, he's always been on our side!"*

*"Bud, did you hear what I just said?"*

*"I heard. Call Hahn's field deputy and set up a meeting for us next week and we'll go in and see what can be done."*

*He was always thinking of his Lifeguards; always looking out for their best interest, and his Lifeguards were every man or woman who patrolled any beach anywhere. A few weeks later I saw him off to Hawaii to spend his final days with his son Mike, who had also been one of the county Lifeguards' finest. I handed him a poem that I had written for him. He read it and smiled, "Thanks."*