

Larry Gervais

My Friend: My Brother

By Lola Reed Langford

On February 14, 2020, A legend in the American Postal Workers Union (APWU) joined his beloved wife in their next world. He leaves behind two children, known to me as Doug and Rene', and their families, as well as other family members. As my own sorrow fills my heart, I know it is nothing compared to theirs. It doesn't seem enough to send thoughts and prayers, but in the end that is all we can send. My thoughts and prayers are sent your way, as well as those of the members of the S. Paul Area Local, APWU, The St. Paul Area Retiree's Chapter and many friends throughout the APWU.

When Larry came into the postal service as a sub-clerk (currently known as part-time flexible clerk), he quickly joined the National Postal Union (NPU). His organizational skills and his ability to speak up and resolve problems was quickly recognized and he was appointed to be a "sub-rep". The union and the postal service didn't have bargaining rights currently enjoyed by employees; we had what we called "collective begging". Bargaining for wages, working conditions, hours of work, progressive discipline and defense of wrongful disciplinary actions was non-existent. The infamous strike in 1970 established those things.

Here in St. Paul, Larry was the force behind the strike. He was our "strike captain". We walked out after our PM shifts and picketed in front of the main post office until Larry assigned us to stations before time for the letter carriers to report to work. He was the one who checked to see that the stations were covered. Without him the St. Paul strike probably would have not been successful.

After the strike. The unions gained the right to real collective bargaining and subsequently several unions merged. Thus, the NPU became the APWU. Larry was involved in making those things happen.

After things settled down a bit, Larry was appointed to the position of National Business Agent which he held for thirty or so years. During that time, he represented the Minneapolis Region (Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota) at arbitration hearings, during national and local negotiations, taught us how to investigate and process grievances aimed at protecting us and our rights, encouraged us to speak up when something was wrong, taught us how to approach our congressional leaders when action was needed on that level, and taught us that we deserved good and safe working conditions.

Comments I have received show the regard in which Larry is and always will be held e.g. "We've lost the best and the brightest"; He left his mark on bettering the working conditions for postal workers". "He always tried to find common ground between the parties in order to resolve problems". "His memory and almost total recall of past arbitration awards and positions taken in past negotiations was phenomenal". "His ability to see all sides of a problem and quickly analyze ways to approach it helped solve many seemingly unsolvable problems". "All postal employees owe him a debt of gratitude."

I came into the postal service in 1967. I met Larry in 1968. He is the one who helped me see the value of collective bargaining (unions). He is the one who helped me see that collective bargaining would fail if employees like me didn't step up and speak up. Over the years I found his advice and friendship to be unfailing. Many times, he pushed me into things I didn't want to do or thought I couldn't do. He had

more faith in me than I had in myself. We were friends for so long that I came to see him as my brother. As I go through the rest of my life, I will carry lessons learned from Larry close to me.

So long my friend. I'll see you later.