

## "Bob"

[The loss of his son, Captain Robert Shannon, over Iceland during World War II brought forth the following tribute to "Bob" from a bereaved father. The editorial has been described as one of the most eloquent expressions of a father's love for a son to appear in the annals of American journalism. It has been compared to the classic editorial by the late William Allen White on his daughter, "Mary." It is hoped it will bring a measure of comfort and understanding to other Iowans who have suffered similar losses. THE EDITOR.]

Bob was so much a part of this community that a few personal words are perhaps justified. The avalanche of friendly expressions, the sympathy, the kindnesses — all point to the fact that his old home town was deeply and sincerely interested in him. I know that his friends and neighbors share the shock and the sorrow of his death, just as they seemed to share our pride in him.

I still think of him as a little boy. That is probably a common parental experience. We don't like to see these children grow up, and we mentally resist the processes of time which bring them to manhood and womanhood. Little memory pictures of Bob's childhood days crowd in now in panoramic fashion. The little blue middy suit he wore to school. His peculiar, springy walk. The time he disturbed the bumblebees' nest and got stung on the leg. They are

endless and precious. He had in his make-up an infinitely tender streak. I think of him as he sat on the basement steps holding in his arms a chicken which we had marked for immediate execution. He was crying copiously at the thought and his tears were trickling down upon the prospective victim. Somehow we didn't seem to care for the meat course next day.

In the home he was a constant source of entertainment. He early acquired a fine sense of humor and he often worked it to the point of exasperation. He carried that trait to school with him and his monthly report cards sometimes made us shudder. He was so full of mischief that we knew instinctively, when devilment was afoot in the neighborhood, that Bob was in it somewhere. We scolded, of course, but secretly we were amused. One thing he dreaded above everything else — the thought that somebody might decide he was a "sissy." It is reasonably certain that nobody did. There is evidence to believe, in fact, that he was the despair of his teachers, but in spite of it they all seemed to like him; and to him this was more important than good grades.

From that rather irresponsible period of his life there emerged gradually an engaging personality, a fine character, a love of people, a kindly attitude. Little children in the neighborhood said "Hi, Bob" whenever they met him on the street, thereby paying him high compliment. Old people liked him, too, and they pleased his parents tremendously by reporting over and over again how kind and considerate he was. This characteristic became a habit. He found joy and pleasure in kindness. In the home he never forgot a birth-date or an occasion which might call for a gift. Three hours before the tragic message reached us from the War Department there was a Mother's Day telegram at the house, cabled from England. He wrote constantly from his various bases in the war theaters and

we wondered how he found the time. But we knew he was simply practicing an art he had developed to a high degree — the art of being kind.

Into all his letters he breathed a deep appreciation for his friends back home, his family, his opportunities. We got from him only the pleasant, delightful things, none of the bad. If he mentioned hardships at all he made us think he was enjoying them to the fullest and he probably was.

In aviation he apparently found the niche for which he was intended. He made an enviable record, and reached the rank of Captain in what we understand to be a remarkably short time. His citations and decorations were mentioned only casually in his letters and his last decoration, an Oak Leaf Cluster, wasn't mentioned at all. When this fact was called to his attention he replied in a letter received Monday night: "I didn't mention this last award to you because I didn't feel it was important enough. I haven't done a thing in this war but go out and come home. We did have a good record all the way through my combat experience, but it was routine flying and there were no heroics. Please make this plain to my friends. I don't want anyone to have the wrong impression about this." I quote the above because it seems to be his wish. That attitude was typical of Bob.

He would not complain, I am sure, of his fate on that foggy Icelandic shore last Monday. He was where he wanted to be. He had flown nearly 100,000 miles over three continents. He had participated in the greatest adventure of all time. He had played an important part in that adventure and had enjoyed himself to the fullest while doing it. In his twenty-seven years he was given a lifetime of thrills and experiences. He had lived dangerously, excitingly and, we believe, usefully. He would not have asked for more than that.

For his family and friends there are heartaches, of course. But down through the ages mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters and friends have suffered those same heartaches. When the world goes on a mad and bloody war spree, sorrow inevitably trails in its wake. There are millions of fathers and mothers in the world today who have learned that fact, and there probably will be millions more before the so-called human race finally decides that wars are futile, unnecessary, and not worth the price we pay for them. Until that day dawns those of us who have boys in the service must expect to take our turns at grief.

If Bob's contribution has any influence at all in the direction of a permanent peace we shall take a measure of comfort from that thought.

But just now our own little insignificant world seems pretty drab.

In common with other parents we probably have been centering our thought and hopes too much upon a glorious occasion — the day "when Bob comes home."