

## Willard Dean Sharpe

13 DECEMBER, 1922 – 1 MARCH, 2022



Willard Dean Sharpe was born in Oak Park, Illinois on Dec. 13, 1922, to Jessie Slater and Harold Sharpe. He was the only child of 5 to survive childhood. He earned his Eagle Scout rank. He attended Carleton College, graduating in 1947.

During the summer of 1942, aware that his draft number was soon to be called, he took a summer semester at The University of Michigan.

While in the Army, Bill was stationed in Attu, Alaska, the furthest of the islands in the Aleutian chain, where he was a Signalman. He spent 3 years in the Army, eventually earning the rank of Technician, Fourth Grade. He wrote that “all I brought out of the Army that stuck with me was some knowledge of the sea and a preference for living

within sight of salt water.”

After the war, he returned to Carleton to complete his bachelor’s degree. Then Bill undertook a PhD program in economics at Harvard, funded by the GI Bill, graduating in 1955. He spent a year in Grenoble, France, on a Fulbright scholarship. His dissertation was on French economic policies in the interwar period.

For some years, he worked for the U.S. government in the Economic Cooperation Administration of the Marshall Plan, later called Aid for International Development (AID).

In that capacity, he spent time in Paris, (he was fluent in French) where he met, among other notables, James Baldwin, with whom he took horseback riding lessons 2-3 times per week for months with a couple of beautiful women. He also enjoyed skiing in Europe.

From 1956-1962, he worked for Kaiser Aluminum, in their long-range planning and international departments, initially based in San Francisco. At 36, he was briefly married to Sandra Taylor. When he was given an assignment by Kaiser in Switzerland, they moved together there, where a daughter, Susan, was born in 1960.

In the mid-sixties, he worked as a project manager for Stanford Research Institute, living in Menlo Park, California. One of the projects there was done for AID, looking at the economic consequences of the expanding war in Vietnam. This turned into an opportunity to work again with AID, this time in Vietnam.

Bill arrived in Saigon in 1966, and began work as Acting Chief of the Joint USAID/Embassy Economic Office, later Chief. Within his first year there, he had visited most of the 44 provinces of South Vietnam and come to love the country.

His second brief marriage was to an AID secretary, Showane Thach. They had a daughter, Nathalie, who was born in Vietnam in 1971.

During his time in Vietnam, two couples in California, Bill's close friends, asked him to help them each adopt a baby girl. He said he chose the babies who were quick to smile at him. These adoptions brought to the U.S. two people who are living happy lives, and are now both mothers. He rarely spoke of it, but it hurt him to leave so many other sweet children behind.

He left Saigon in December 1974. Then, with his friend and former employer Chuck Cooper, he flew to Saigon on April 17, 1975, the day Phnom Penh fell. They stayed a week, and managed to help the families of two high level South Vietnamese government officials and some others escape what would surely have been dismal fates. They left on the last scheduled flight on April 24. The plane was crowded with people standing in the aisle, and Bill had an unnamed little boy on his lap until the plane landed in Manila, where those without visas disembarked. Back in Washington, he worked to help the flood of Vietnamese refugees arriving there. One refugee, known well to him from Saigon, stayed with Bill for some months in his little D.C. apartment, and he was accompanied by his wife and 4 young children. "They all slept in a row on the floor," he said. The children of that family have all gone on to be very successful adults.

From 1976 until 1978, Bill worked for the U.S. Treasury in Hong Kong. He loved the lifestyle there, where he lived on the 7th floor of an apartment building high up on the mountain of the main island. He enjoyed spectacular views of the Hong Kong harbor. His job entailed traveling the countries of east Asia, including Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia, with the object of analyzing each country's ability and willingness to pay its external debts. He enjoyed this tremendously.

In 1978 he retired from the U.S. government and began working for Chase Manhattan Bank, also in Hong Kong. He moved from one luxurious apartment to another at 26 Magazine Gap Rd with absolutely unparalleled views. Bill was a bachelor, with a live-in cook of a quiet and capable disposition.

During this time, he owned a 26' wooden sloop called the Snowgoose, and belonged to the Royal Hong Kong Yacht Club. In 1982, he and his crew of 5 men took part in the South China Sea Race from Hong Kong to Manila. Bill wrote up the story of this event, which included a 2-day storm with 20' waves, in a piece that was published in the Asian Wall Street Journal.

He left Hong Kong in 1986, lived briefly near New York City, then moved to a house he had purchased earlier in Sausalito, California, which had fabulous views of the San Francisco Bay. He served on the Board of the Bank of San Francisco for several years.

In retirement, Bill volunteered for California's Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program, which provides mentors for youth in foster care. He surprised everyone by giving up sailing and buying a plane. He became an instrument-rated pilot at age 80, and once flew with a co-pilot from California to Michigan to visit family. He played tennis often. He kept a charming flat in London overlooking the St. Luke's churchyard in the Chelsea district, and often visited the south of France.

Bill made and maintained many friendships with fascinating, intelligent and worldly people he met along the way. His large address book was always nearby. Among his closest friends were those from his time in Vietnam. He lived out his last years in his Sausalito home with a view of salt water, and passed away peacefully at age 99 on March 1, 2022. He is survived by daughter Susan Greenlee (Art), three grandsons, Daniel Goldman, William Greenlee, Arthur Greenlee IV, and daughter Nathalie Sharpe.