

Joseph (“Joe”) Sample, born March 15, 1923, died peacefully on Oct. 13, at his home in Billings. He was 99 years old. Joe was predeceased by his wife, Miriam Tyler Sample, his sister, Sally Aal, and his son, Michael Sample. He is survived by two of his sons, David and Patrick Sample, as well as seven grandchildren and 14 great-grandchildren.

Joe was born in Chicago and graduated from Yale in 1945. During World War II, he led intelligence missions in China for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), predecessor of the CIA. Recalled into the Korean War, he served as Chief, Domestic Intelligence, for Fifth Army Headquarters. Joe was reticent to speak of his service, as he had security clearances and possessed classified information late into his life. He acknowledged surviving a helicopter crash, and that he carried and was ready to consume a cyanide pill rather than risk revealing any intelligence under torture or otherwise. While stationed in China for the OSS, he would often play poker with Chinese Nationalists one night and the Communists the next.

As a professional, Joe began work as an intern for a Chicago advertising agency and quickly rose to Vice President and Media Director. While Joe was always proud of his Chicago upbringing and his professional work there, Montana stole his heart while he was driving through the state to a wedding in Missoula. Joe realized as he was passing through Butte that he had forgotten his tuxedo shirt, and he was told by a local that the only person in town who would have a tux was “the undertaker”—whom he went to visit and who happily loaned him the shirt for the ceremony. Joe decided then and there that a place where the only person in town who owned a tux was the mortician, was a place he wanted to live.

A few years later, in 1954, Joe moved to Billings, and a year later he joined then KOOK-AM-TV as a minority stockholder and President. He established the Montana Television Network with stations in Billings, Butte, Great Falls and Missoula. Joe served as president of the Billings Chamber of Commerce and the

Rocky Mountain Broadcasters Association. He was also Vice-Chairman of the Montana Educational Broadcasting Commission.

During this period, he married Miriam Tyler Willing from Richmond, VA, who in answer to Joe's concern that he needed to find someone willing to live in Montana, had said, "No, Joe. You need to find someone who can live with you." Fortunately, they married soon after this encounter and the marriage lasted forty-three delightful years.

Retiring in 1984, Joe became a programmer and board member of Yellowstone Public Radio. His jazz program, borne out of his Chicago roots, was called "Spreadin' Rhythm Around" and has aired for more than two decades with original content curated by him as "Scatman," and introduced in his raspy radio voice, about which he was always characteristically self-deprecating. Dedicated listeners to YPR will also remember his annual fundraiser for the station, which he conducted pseudonymously as "Fred Seeds" from "The Watermelon Growers of Northern New Jersey." Joe never wanted credit for the fundraiser, and he rarely even privately acknowledged that he was behind it, but he delighted in writing the scripts for the dramatic portions of the show, voicing his character, and matching the community's gifts made during the show.

During this same time, Joe became president of the Greater Montana Foundation, as well as the Sample Foundation, which endeavors to serve the poor and otherwise underprivileged. As recently as last Sunday, and well-aware that his time was limited, Joe was still leading a productive meeting of the foundation's directors as they sought to allocate funds to Montana non-profit applicants. Joe always believed that because he had found his greatest professional success in Montana, the state he loved should be the primary recipient of his philanthropy. Still, the Sample Foundation did not satisfy Joe's appetite for giving, and outside his work at the foundation, he frequently, personally, and often anonymously, funded local initiatives that he believed to be crucial that would not otherwise have come to fruition.

Joe was a founding director of Alberta Bair Theater, and founding chairman of the Burton K. Wheeler Center. During his career he also served on a number of boards, including the University of Montana School of Business, US National Bank, Mountain Bell, Boys & Girls Club, United Way, Museum of the Rockies, Northern Hotel Co., Rocky Mountain College, and Montana Public Television. He was governor of the Western Canada Hockey League and President/Owner of the Billings Bighorns. Joe is in the National Broadcasters Hall of Fame, and among the awards he received were the Governor's Medals for both the Arts and the Humanities, and honorary degrees from MSU and Rocky Mountain College.

Later in life, Joe spent his winters in Naples, FL, in a community developed by his father. However, Joe deliberately spent more of his year in the state of Montana, so that he could pay his taxes there, rather than benefit from Florida-specific tax advantages. Financial planners might call that crazy; but for him, it was loyalty.

Politically, Joe was a committed independent throughout his life, believing in smart statesmen and stateswomen while disdaining party politics. He greatly admired both Montana Democrat Mike Mansfield and Wyoming Republican Alan Simpson. In his view, they exemplified country over party and integrity over all. In his last decade, Joe regularly expressed concern that leaders in the GOP at both the state and national levels had abandoned even the pretense of those principles.

Service to his country, entrepreneurship, and philanthropy made for a full life. Yet, Joe somehow also found time to appreciate western art and artists and to build an impressive personal collection, which he has shared with museums all over the West. Joe was a devoted Green Bay Packers fan, an abysmal piano player, and a lifelong student of the Civil War. He loved the Chicago Cubs, and baseball in general, having lived to watch both Babe Ruth in person, and, just days ago, Aaron Judge on television, make history. He loved writing "crank" letters to newspapers and universities lampooning or otherwise deriding an article, editorial, policy, lawmaker or whatever he deemed a worthy target for his well-honed, sometimes

sardonic wit. His closest friends also received similar letters, marked by their thinly veiled, playful insults, and often fictitious, darkly comic stationery headings.

In the end, however, Joe's friends and family most engaged and delighted him. He loved ribbing his children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren, as well as his friends — on most of whom he had bestowed vaguely insulting nicknames that actually indicated his great respect (except for the lawyers.)

Over the last decade or more, he found not only tremendous health and logistical assistance with the challenges of nonagenarian life, but also a worthy and willing foil for his often vexing sense of humor, in his devoted daughter-in-law, Barbara Sample, whom he renamed "Many Horses" because she "nagged a lot," and who was his primary caretaker for the last years of his life.

After the loss of his beloved wife, Miriam, and the murder of his son, Michael, Joe manifested the strength, resolve, and positivity of The Greatest Generation. He frequently observed that he did "not purchase unripe bananas." And yet he lived on for many more years than he expected, and he remained an exceedingly generous, civic-minded and productive leader in Billings and the state of Montana.

His loss represents a deeply personal one for many of us. For this community and the state, his loss leaves a gaping hole of civic leadership that Joe always hoped would be filled by new generations of fair-minded Montanans committed to ensuring the state remains "The Last Best Place."

In lieu of flowers, Joe's family asks for donations to one of the many organizations he served and supported, including The Billings Public Library Foundation, Yellowstone Public Radio, and Montana PBS.