

Remarks at the memorial service in St. Louis 12 October 2003

CHARLES I. ROSE

May 4, 1901 - September 6, 2003

We are here to mark the passing of a century. My father's life spanned the whole of the twentieth century--and then some. Much happened to him, and to this city, along the way.

Charles I. Rose was born on May 4, 1901 in South St. Louis. His parents were South St. Louis Dutch. The middle initial stands for Imse, his mother's maiden name. It is a contraction of Immensee, a small lake in the countryside near Zurich. His grandparents or great-grandparents were part of the great migration from German-speaking Central Europe after the collapse of the 1848 liberal revolution. One of my father's great-uncles fought in the Civil War on the Union side.

The initial family home was over a store selling coffee at 1805 South Jefferson. As a small boy my father helped take care of the delivery wagon, a horse. The family soon graduated to a three-story home on 3800 Castleman at Spring. There was a grand piano in the front hall, and he and his two sisters and brother were expected to practice an hour a day. Until 1917 he went to Saturday classes in German. The piano lessons stuck. Whilst waiting for my mother to get ready to go out, he would play bits of Eddie Duchin on the piano.

My father went to McKinley High School. He wanted to become a chemical engineer. The two leading schools in that field were Illinois and Cornell; he chose the University of Illinois. This was fortunate, for there he met my mother, who had been born on a farm in Macon County, Illinois. She went to Illinois to become a home economics teacher.

At Illinois he became a member of Sigma Xi, the science counterpart of Phi Beta Kappa, and took an MSc with a thesis on the Relative Resistance of Spinel, Zircons and Sillimanite to Attack by Molten Glasses. He also played the ukelele, useful on social occasions before the radio and victrola. He had a taste for jazz-age shirts. In the 1980s in New York his granddaughter Clare dazzled her fellow students there by wearing one of his striped silk fench-Cuff shirts as a blouse.

As a student just after the First World War, my father joined the Reserve Officers' Training Corps, but did not stay in the Army Reserve. He was part of that narrow age cohort that was too young to be drafted for the First War and too old for the Second War. The only weapons my father ever wielded were his brains and his voice.

After leaving university my father worked as a research chemist for Union Carbide in Buffalo, New York. He did not take to its bureaucratic research setting and wrote 50 letters looking for a job elsewhere. When no reply came, he decided that the family coffee business was better and returned to St. Louis. A few days after making that decision, he was offered a job in Pittsburgh; a few years ago he wondered aloud what would have happened if the offer had arrived earlier.

Rose Coffee Company specialized in selling coffee at a nickel a cup to the lunch places, grills and drug stores that flourished when Prohibition closed taverns and bars. On the street he dealt with all sorts and conditions of people. This provided an education like that of the Dickens' character who ran in the streets of London in the 1840s. Except the language of St. Louis restaurants was not English: it was money. My father did not believe in credit; the day that Roosevelt closed the banks, he had the best part of one thousand dollars in his pocket.

My parents were married in rural Illinois in June, 1925. The first family home was in South St. Louis, where my sister was born. Helen Traubel, the first American Wagnerian soprano, grew up nearby. At the beginning of the 1930s they emigrated west to Clayton. The Moorlands was then a series of lots and builders hoping to find a buyer. At the bottom of the Depression, when good workmen were looking for work, my father superintended the building of the house at 7430 Byron. I was born in a state-of-the-art house; it had electric fans and a radio as well as a piano and paper fans.

In 1940 my father saw the threat of war. Whatever happens, he thought: you have to eat. So he bought a 400-acre farm in Callaway County that an insurance company had acquired from a bankrupt owner. The farmhouse was more like the homes of the founders of Clayton than those on Byron: it lacked electricity, a piped water supply and an indoor toilet. My father was much more than an investor: he applied his scientific and business skills as an improving farmer. Initially, he would make the 100-mile drive to the farm on Thursday afternoons and Sundays, and then scaled down to once a week.

In the late 1950s my father's career diversified further. He left the coffee business and spent a few years selling engineering machinery. At the age of 61, he passed the New York Stock Exchange exam before retiring from there to become a private investor.

In the mid-1960s my father could enjoy more leisure, and he began to travel the world with my mother. In part it was curiosity and in part to see his grandchildren in Britain. Alternate summers we would come to Byron and he would fix up toys appropriate to his grandchildren's age. This was a change from my childhood, when he fixed up an electric train set appropriate to an adult electrical engineer. There was also Marianne, my sister's daughter. The result was that all four grandchildren were able to

become unusually close to both grandparents. His grandsons have followed him in being more interested in engineering than in writing books.

When my mother fell victim to a debilitating disease, my father responded with enormous stamina and courage. To understand what was happening, he went to the library to read pharmacopoeia. After her death, he faced the loneliness of an 84-year old widower whose male friends were mostly dead. Farmland came to his rescue. The downs and ups of farming created opportunities: the spread grew to 1100 acres, and he diversified into cattle. There are now hundreds of cows and silos to fast-feed them that tower higher than the yellow arches of McDonalds.

My father was retired at the age of 96 by losing his driver's license. In his hundredth year he could still contribute to the Clayton community by tying down for an afternoon a group of Internal Revenue Service officials who wanted to go over his tax returns. They got less than the minimum wage for the hours they spent.

Both my parents were punctilious in making no comment about the choices I made, starting with going to England at the age of 20, marrying in England and leaving the Post-Dispatch for Oxford in 1957. For all that, the Scottish Roses are deeply grateful.

My father's fierce independence did not always make it easy to help him. When friends asked me how he was, the answer was simple: More so. As his strength waned, he became more dependent on my sister and her husband, Jack Loire. For what they did, we are all deeply grateful.

While his body weakened, my father's mental faculties remained. Within the past year I watched him spend an hour going through his safe deposit box sorting out 50-year old stock certificates affected by corporate mergers.

When I last saw my father at the end of August, he had just enough strength to get out of bed and get down a steep flight of stairs. He could also talk nonstop for an hour. But the candle was burning very low. Ten days later it went out. He died in his sleep at Byron Place. May we all live so long and die so well.

Charles Richard Rose, son