

Respected journalist Ande Yakstis remembered for his humanitarian efforts

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
March 2 2015 11:00 AM



Long-time journalist/humanitarian Ande Yakstis died Sunday evening after heart complications.

Yakstis, 81, spent more than 40 years as a full-time reporter at The Telegraph in Alton, then continued to write as a correspondent for the newspaper and other publications in his retirement years. He was twice nominated and twice finished second in the Pulitzer Prize competition for his investigative reporting work.

Yakstis was one of the co-authors of "You Can't Kill the Dream: People Living the Dream," published in 2013, a paperback book of profiles surrounding Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., his life and the assassination.

He devoted much to his life to church and humanitarian efforts. He was an ordained United Church of Christ minister. The visitation for Yakstis will be from 9 to 11 a.m. at the Wood River United Church of Christ on Thursday. The funeral will follow at 11 a.m.

Heath Yakstis, Ande's only son, said his father was an exceptional dad and grandfather.

"Ian, my son, his grandson, and dad were really close," Heath said. "Dad always took a lot of time with him. Dad loved reading and doing creative things, building things. He did a lot of that with face-to-face time that he gave Ian. It helped Ian learn and develop. He was the same way with me, too. He always had time to get down there and interact and nurture you with hope."

Heath said his father was an avid bird watcher and through him he acquired that and his love of science and nature.

"I think he instilled a lot of good values and positivity from an early age. We were really close and I always looked forward to being with him and spending time with him."

Ande Yakstis wasn't one to talk much about his time in the Korean War, like many of that era, but he volunteered and served in the Army, surviving some cold times on Korean soil.

He was wounded with shrapnel in the legs and was a forward observer.

"Dad dug into a fox hole in Korea and would call in artillery and air attacks in front of enemy lines with temperatures well below zero. He could fix any weapon in the Army from the biggest guns to the smallest of firearms."



Dennis Grubaugh, who is co-owner/editor of the Illinois Business Journal, worked for years at The Telegraph, last serving as city editor. He described Ande as widely respected.

"He cut away from the normal journalistic type and was a good, Christian man," he said. "You don't always associate a bulldog journalist with being a religious spirit. In the later years he softened up a bit, but he was always a good journalist. He won the Elijah P. Lovejoy Freedom Award and that is a unique honor. You have to be a special kind of character to even be nominated for that type of thing. He certainly was a good character to be recognized for that award."

Steve Whitworth, also a one-time city editor/reporter at The Telegraph and widely recognized journalist, said it was a privilege and honor to work with one of the best journalists The Telegraph ever produced.

"He treated people fairly," Whitworth said. "He was very strong on civil rights issues. He marched

with Dr. King. He was well respected by all parts of the community. He was a great co-worker and a good friend.”

Heath Yakstis said his dad serviced the region with not only his writing, but his actions.

“He helped promote anything he could from Operation Blessing, to local food banks, and did anything he could for local churches. He used his journalism for advocacy, too. He was well respected in the community and everybody knew him and appreciated his work.”

Ande's son said the Yakstis family requests that instead of flowers, he encouraged people to donate to the Crisis Food Center in Alton or the United Church of Christ in Wood River.

Ande Yakstis – A 50-year commitment to Human Rights

Ande Yakstis has committed his life to human rights and the Civil Rights Movement for more than 50 years.

The following are some of the personal stories of Ande's 50 year record in human rights.

1 - In the late 1950's many restaurants and business places were still segregated. Yakstis and some local ministers met with business owners and asked them in a peaceful manner to open their doors to people of all races. Gradually, restaurants and business places began to serve people of all races.

2 - Alton School Supt J.B. Johnson asked Yakstis and Telegraph Publisher Paul Cousley to present to him some ideas to help complete the integration of Alton schools, including athletics. Yakstis and Cousley's work was praised by the school district superintendent.

3 - In 1964, the attorneys of Madison County presented Ande with the Liberty Bell Award at a dinner to honor him for his accuracy and understanding of the law in reporting on the courts and trials in the county.

4 - In the early 1970s, Rocky Fork New Bethel AME Church, a black congregation in Godfrey, was set on fire by a pipe bomb. Rocky Fork is a historic black church in the United States, and was started by a freed slave, Rev. Erasmus Green, in 1867. Ande personally organized a community campaign to rebuild the church. People of all denominations and races came together and the church was rebuilt. The black churches in Madison County presented Ande with the annual Brotherhood Award for his effort.

5 - Yakstis learned some black people were sent to prison for minor offenses and some inmates were forgotten. One black man from Alton was in prison for 25 years for shoplifting. Yakstis, with the help of Attorney Emerson Baetz, sought a writ of habeas corpus and the man was immediately freed from prison by a judge in Madison County.

6 - In the 1970s Yakstis learned that many people on low incomes were going hungry and many were homeless. As a result, Ande Yakstis helped Frances Jackson start the Crisis Food Center in Alton in 1977. Today it provides food for hundreds of people every month.

7 - In 1974, Yakstis and reporter Pat Plarski did an investigation of child abuse and wrote a series of stories on the epidemic of abuse of children. The Illinois Medical Society presented Ande and Pat with their highest humanitarian award in 1975 for their stories. And new laws were introduced in the state legislature for reporting suspected cases of child abuse..

8 - Yakstis is a veteran of the Korean War. He has been an advocate of rights for veterans, and has written nearly 100 about veterans.

9 - In 1997, Yakstis was presented with the National Elijah Lovejoy Award for “distinguished writings and personal initiative for human rights and justice” “During his career, Ande has been an advocate for the rights of people, especially the underprivileged and minorities,” said Rev.

Robert Tabscott who presented the award to Ande at a public ceremony at the Lovejoy Monument in Alton.

10 - In 2002, the U.S. Congress in a resolution in the official U.S. Congressional Record honored Yakstis for 50 years of commitment to human rights, especially as an advocate for minorities and veterans.

Text @RB to 618-202-4618 to sign up for Text Alerts from RiverBender!