

A TRIBUTE TO A LIFE INSURANCE “LEAD EAGLE” GRANT TAGGART



“It has been said that the Million Dollar Round Table is like a ‘flock of eagles.’ Even though eagles don’t flock, Grant was, and always will be, our ‘lead eagle.’”

GRANT TAGGART

1896-1979

Grant Taggart was a giant among the life insurance sales forces. The soft-spoken and gentle –mannered Taggart from Cowley, Wyoming, became such an illustrious figure within the industry, that there was an almost legendary aura surrounding his name. And, although he was his company’s top producer for many years and served on its board of directors, he never lost sight of the fact that life insurance is for widows and orphans.

Grant was born on July 1, 1896, in Morgan, Utah. When he was four years old, the family with a group of about 300 other people, moved to the Big Horn Basin of Wyoming to help establish the towns of Byron, Cowley, and Lovell.

Grant, his parents, and his 15 brothers and sisters lived in tents until a more permanent shelter could be built. Although Grant’s father boarded up the main tent to a height of about four feet and provided it with a board floor, it still wasn’t tight enough to prevent an occasional rattlesnake from getting in, or the hens from laying eggs in the beds.

Grant’s childhood years were spent working on the family acreage and attending school in a one-room log cabin. By the time he reached high school age, Big Horn Academy, an imposing two-story structure, was ready. It was while at the Academy, in 1914, that he signed an agent’s contract with Western States Life.

Many times, Grant retold the story of his first real success in the business. “Soon after the first year in 1915, my manager offered me a trip to Salt Lake City, with all expenses paid, if I would write bit \$5,000 of business during February. I was in high school at the time, and so enthused with an opportunity to ride on a railroad train, that I went to work immediately, after school hours, and was successful in writing \$12,500 on business.”

Grant made his rounds on the back of a borrowed horse his first two years in the business, calling on the people within a fifty-mile radius.

He married Fern Snell, the daughter of another pioneer family in the Big Horn Basin area. In time, they became the parents of daughter, Kay, and twin sons, Cal and Hal. Both Cal and Hall were also in the insurance industry. (Fern died in 1977, and Grant later married Mrs. Sterling Ercanbrack of Provo, Utah.)

Grant and Fern moved to Greybull, Wyoming. Soon after arriving in town, he told Fern to set up an account at the grocery store. “But,” he said, “don’t pay the bill on time. Pay it ahead and let’s show the community that we’re honest. If people feel

that we're honest, possibly they will listen to me, and maybe I can make you a living." She did, and they did, and he did. Result: 257 apps in Greybull that year for \$800,000 of ordinary life insurance production.

His first million-dollar year was 1925, two years before the Million Dollar Round Table was formed. He was to become chairman of that organization in 1936.

In 1942, Brant became president of the National Association of Life Underwriters (NALU). He used the position to help the nation's war effort in World War II. Through personal appearances and radio broadcasts, he recruited 20,000 agents to sell war bonds throughout the country. Because of his achievement, he received a special citation from the Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Morgenthau, Jr.

In 1952, Grant became the first agent to receive the John Newton Russell Memorial Award, the life insurance industry's highest award. The citation read in part: "Grant Taggart has been a distinguished part of the life insurance community since the earliest days of his career. His contributions to the welfare of our business have been of monumental proportions and of lasting value, and significantly have been made by one who has always been, and remains, a career field underwriter, he having elected to pursue that occupational course in preference to management or executive duties."

In great demand as a speaker, Grant traveled the nation, attending company conventions, sales seminars, and local association meetings, telling his story, inspiring, guiding and counseling thousands of young men and women in the early years of their life insurance careers. His words remain today as a guideline for new agents and as a reminder for us all:

"The door is ajar if you want to pay the price in a systemized, well organized, determined effort... So take the road ahead... courageously, fearlessly, and have the courage to live. And to live is to just keep on keeping on."

"I don't mind saying that if I had my life to live over again, I would want to do just more of the same thing. I would want to be a street agent. I would want to be attaining for myself the compensation that comes far and beyond the dollars I make. But I want to tell you young agents who are here that it may be discouraging to you, but you little realize what only I could start over and be your ages. So, I admonish you to more adequately take the road ahead courageously."

SELECTED ANECDOTES AND SAYINGS OF GRANT TAGGART, WYOMING'S HOME-SPUN PHILOSOPHER

"Don't any of you gentlemen ever sell life insurance to widows or orphans? There is too much welfare, too much relief, too much dignification of indolence in all our countries. We need to get back to fundamentals of hard work and persistence."

"I came from a family that believed in hard work, thrift and persistence, and I guess I was hungry."

"We had no money, so I borrowed me a horse and went to work."

"The door of success in this great business of ours is always ajar if you are willing to pay the price in a sincere, well-organized, and a determined effort. It will be closed if you pursue the opposite course."

"Regardless of where you go, people are human beings. There are fine people everywhere. If you can impress them in one place, you can impress them in another."

"I would give all I own, all I could borrow with all of your signatures, if only I could start and be at your ages. So, I admonish you to more adequately take the road ahead courageously."

"My experiences have been an education of incalculable value. I have come to the realization as never before that there is no substitute for well-directed planning and hard work."

"Haphazard planning and desolatory efforts have no place in the large producer's scheme."

"There is no business that affords a greater opportunity for the individual to really get close to people than is the case of selling life insurance."

"We should not allow ourselves to be caught in any whirlpool of confused and depressed thinking, but we should steer a straight course that will lead us to our desires objectives."

“Our behavior under pressures, under crossfire, and in the face of reverses and disappointment will largely determine our worth.”

“We need to remember that it is our individual persistence and determination alone that are all important, and that the slogan, “Press On” has, and always will, solve the problems of the human race.”

“It will always be hard times and rough if you insist on thinking negatively. But, while the sun is shining, if you make hay you will get all that is coming to you. So don’t let discouragement or hard times floor you or steal your good reputation.”

“We need to realize that all must be well at home with the family, or contentment is impossible in our work. It would be well to check up on ourselves and our habits. If all is well at home, all is well with the salesman.”

“We should not be ashamed of our callings, but we should be ashamed of our not callings.”

“I have often said that people who are wrapped up in themselves make rather small packages.”

“I can assure you men as you go forward in MDRT that it is not the money that you are going to make that is going to give you the greater service. The think that is going to make that is going to give you the greater service that you have rendered to people.”

“The best that is in us will never be brought out until we are forced to meet adverse conditions.”

“Only when forced to do so does a man develop new and original ideas or methods which will enable him to overcome existing obstacles. Half of the world’s troubles and certainly most of our troubles today can be charged to the mental attitude of our people.”

“Unless an underwriter has sufficient cash to meet his daily requirements, it will be impossible to keep faith, to hold up his courage, and to stay in this business if he does not do business rather frequently. Frequency, then, is the all-important thing. To you and to me, the best possible tonic is just another application.”

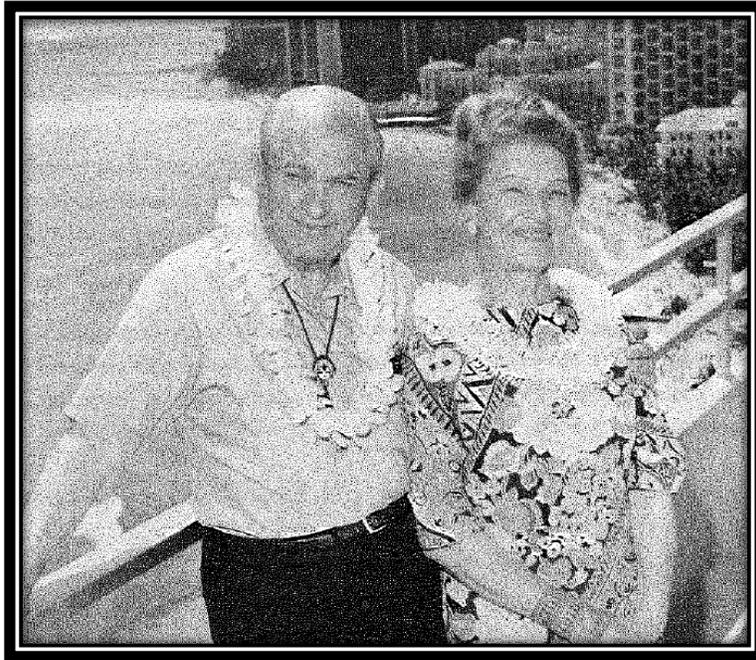
“Allow me to impress you with the importance of decency and honesty in this business of keen competition. Let us big enough to boost the institution of life insurance and forget our silly bickering on less important matters.”

“Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.”

Grant often recited this poem:

When despair’s sharp edges near,
 Go to work.
When your mind is wracked in fear,
 Go to work.
When you’re brooding o’er the past
 And the sky seems overcast,
 Trouble’s coming thick and fast,
 Go to Work.

When you think you’ve reached the end,
 Go to work.
When you haven’t e’en a friend,
 Go to work.
When you can’t see light ahead
And you utmost hope has fled,
Don’t lies moping in your bed,
 Go to work.



MEMORIES FROM GRANT'S FAMILY

Grant's concern for people is echoed by his nephew, Lloyd Taggart. Lloyd worked for Boeing in Seattle during the war. There were a number of other friends and family in the military and stationed there. When the NALUU had their annual convention in Seattle, Grant invited Lloyd and the others from the Big Horn basin to attend some of the functions at the convention.

"While all the big producers were swapping stories and sharing ideas, Grant spent his time talking to his guests from Wyoming, making sure they had a great time. Every time he came to Seattle, he'd look us up," Lloyd said.

His concern for people extended to his home town of Cowley. When Cowley tried to float a bond issue to build a sewer system, Grant bought the entire issue at a low rate of interest, and then donated the bonds to his church. Today we would call that a win-win-win deal.

Of course, he was a great salesman. His son Cal tells of the time many years ago when he and his twin brother, Hal, left a family party at Fishing Bridge in Yellowstone to drive over to Lake Hotel to rent a small boat. Still in high school, they had no concept of speed. They soon found themselves staring at a speeding ticket, and calling their father to come pick them up.

When Grant arrived, he recognized the ranger as someone he's written a small policy on years ago. Grant reminded the ranger that he was one of his policyholders. Before Grant was finished, the ticket was dismissed, and the ranger was the proud owner of a new life insurance policy.

We talk of having sales assistants today. Would it occur to you to hire an assistant would relieve the farmer on the tractor while Grant sold the literally "hot" prospect insurance in his air-conditioned Cadillac. Talk about a captive and motivated audience!

But, according to two of his grandsons, his greatest sales job was to the attendant at gas station/car wash in San Francisco. As they rushed to a Giants game, Grant pulled into the station and told the incredulous attendant, "I don't have time to fill up now, but I need a wash. These boys are from Wyoming and have never been through a car wash. Let me go through now, and I'll return after the game and fill up." The attendant, overcome by the sheer logic of the sales pitch, relented. And yes, Grant returned to fill up to earn his free car wash.

TRIBUTES FROM INDUSTRY GREATS

In May of 1937, I was flattered by a telephone call from Grant Taggart. He invited my wife and me to join him and his wife Fern to take the train from Minneapolis to Billings, Montana, where they would meet us to drive through Yellowstone Park, and then on to Denver for the Round Table meeting. Little did I know what wonderful things in the future would unfold from the guidance of this wonderful man. Here was I, a freshman Round Table member, to be taken into my second Round Table

meeting with the “Chairman To Be.” On that memorable trip, I learned how great this Grant Taggart really was. He had a “heart of gold,” and a brilliance combined with a lack of selfishness that combined to make him a rare human being.

John O. Todd, CLU
1951 President, MDRT

Grant has succeeded, because he is in the hearts of those of us who knew him, and he will be admired and respected by those that come to know him through the Grant Taggart Center for Insurance. He has been a great example and inspiration to me, and for thousands more.

Bob Albritton, CLU
1960 President, MDRT

What a wonderful world this would be, if everyone in it were just like Grant Taggart! This sums up my regard for one of the noblest human beings I have ever known. His every act was measured by the impact it could have on others.

I value the picture of Grant with me. It is on a stand, next to my desk in the office. Often I talk to him. Grant, a man who could walk with kinds without losing the human touch. I am a better person for him having been by friend.

Lester A. Rosen, CLU
1962 President, MDRT

I first heard of Grant Taggart 49 years ago. The remarkable thing was, he wrote so many lives in such a sparsely settled community. He had power and conviction. When I had the joy of being with him, I was sure he was one of those western sheriffs who dealt out justice.

Sadler Hayes
1969 President, MDRT

I shall always cherish the memory of a midnight shipboard encounter during the 1956 MDRT meeting; during which Grant mesmerized me with stories of his life insurance career, and his life in general. It was an inspiration that helped me lead and guide me over the next 38 years.

John H. Ames, CLU
1970 President, MDRT

Grant Taggart epitomized the whole man by his quiet yet strong leadership and personal integrity. Grant was a visionary of the future, but built a foundation for it in the present. He stood tall and straight whenever he was with his fellow men. It has been said that the Million Dollar Round Table is like a “flock of eagles.” Even though eagles don’t flock, Grant was, and always will be, our “lead eagle.”

Richard G. Bowers, Sr., CLU
1971 President, MDRT

When Grant died, all who remembered him as a friend and advisor felt that our business had lost a great cornerstone. Yet Grant’s simple and honest message, “Insurance for widows and orphans,” will always stand out as a reminder of our most basic goal—and of the great but humble man who knew as our friend.

Rob Fish, III, CLU
1974 President, MDRT

Grant was really a man’s man, a man who loved the business and loved his clientele, and knew the basic reasons why life insurance is bought. Grant Taggart was one of the greatest life insurance men that ever lived, and he could explain the value of life insurance in a speech to an audience better than anyone else. Grant was a person we all looked up to. He was Mr. Life Insurance, and always will be.

Jack Peckinpugh, CLU, ChFC
1975 President, MDRT

Over the years, Grant became my mentor, my confidant, my close and dear friend. I have always hoped I could someday reach the whole-person statue of Grant Taggart. He is both my idol and my ideal—someone I’m still striving each day to emulate.

Rulon Rasmussen, CLU
1976 President, MDRT

I loved Grant Taggart. He was a role model to us all. He stood strong and tall for all of the things we knew we should believe in and act upon. He was gentle, forgiving, and kind. Mostly, he reminded us that widows and orphans were what the life insurance business was all about. My last memory was the special birthday cake and tribute at the 1976 MDRT Meeting in

Boston. It was an outflow of love to cowboy insurance agent who had grown to an industry giant-we admired him. Americans love cowboys.

Marshall I. Wolper, CLU, ChFC, MSPB
1977 President, MDRT



*Grant's MDRT friends help him celebrate his 80th birthday.
(L to R: Rob Fish, Ben Feldman, Rulon Rasmussen, and Grant.)*

Grant Taggart constantly reminded agents that the bottom line in life insurance is the protection of loved ones. His picture on horseback heading out to call on his policyholders is a vivid image in my mind.

Millard Grauer, CLU, ChFC
1980 President, MDRT

I vividly remember many of Grant's phrases, and have quoted him in almost every talk that I have given since those early days. One of my favorites was his challenge and advice to young people to "Always do your best at whatever your task, because you never know when someone is measuring your for a bigger job." That quote became one of the guiding principles in my life.

Jack B. Turner, CLU, ChFC
1983 President, MDRT

He was the epitome of what I believe to be the "great life insurance salesman" in our industry. He served his clientele in a wide spectrum of economic levels, and he traveled hundreds of miles to call on his clientele in Wyoming. He spent his lifetime preaching the benefits of our product, helping families continue when the breadwinner died, and enabling businesses to continue when the owner died.

Wilmer S. Poyner, III CLU, ChFC
1987 President, MDRT

Grant's council, "No success in the field can compensate for failure in the home," haunted me as I watched my own success tear away at the fabric of my family life. His words have never been far from my thoughts. In fact, my greatest personal and professional victories are combined into one solid fact-my success in the field has been dwarfed by my most blessed and fortunate success at home! Thanks, Grant!

William T. O'Donnell
1992 President, MDRT

Grant Taggart was an inspiration to me even long before I met him. I had just arrived in this country from Iran, and was going to school in Wyoming when I heard of the great Grant Taggart. His marvelous reputation impressed me deeply, although then I never dreamed that I might go into insurance and become a close friend of this great man. He was a wonderful human being, a great teacher, and always went out of his way to help people. I treasure his memory and miss him like a father. May God bless his soul.

Mehdi Fakhazadeh

As I helped prepare the brochure, I increasingly stood in awe of his momentous achievements, He set a blistering pace. More important, was his persistent and timely clarion call to take care of the "broken" family-something we all need to be constantly reminded of.

Carter A. George, CLU, ChFC



*The Taggart family in Sun Valley at a Western States Life Insurance Convention.
(back row, left to right: son Hal, Grant, son Cal; front row, left to right: wife Fern, daughter Kay, daughters-in-law Irene and Phyllis.*