

## Sandy's Last Portage

Dear Friends,

When Sandy was first diagnosed with cancer a little over a year ago, he compared undergoing the treatment to a very arduous portage, knowing that a good paddle on a clear lake lay beyond. We've used the portage metaphor many times this year. At 6:00 PM, December 26, 1997, he peacefully completed his last portage.

Cherie Bridges

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An excellent news article about Sandy's career at the Base ran in the June 1, 1997 edition of the Duluth News-Tribune. The full text by Dominic Papatola.

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The following was read by Butch Diesslin at Sandy's memorial service:

### **A Forever Friend**

Sometimes in life you find a special friend;  
Someone who changes your life just by being a part of it.

Someone who makes you laugh until you can't stop.  
Someone who makes you believe that there really is good in the world.  
Someone who convinces you that there really is an unlocked door just waiting for you to open it.  
This is Forever Friendship.

When you're down, and the world seems dark and empty,

Your Forever Friend lifts you up in spirit and makes that dark and empty world suddenly seem bright and full.

Your Forever Friend gets you through the hard times, the sad times, and the confused times.

If you turn and walk away, your Forever Friend follows.

If you lose your way, your Forever Friend guides you and cheers you on.

Your Forever Friend holds your hand and tells you that everything is going to be okay.

And if you find such a friend, you feel happy and complete, because you need not worry.

You have a Forever Friend for life, and forever has no end.

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A copy of an article written by Curt "Frenchy" Garfield, many time advisor in the 60's and 70's, for the Sudbury, MA paper:

Middlesex Daily News, Thursday, January 1, 1998

## **A Man for all Seasons**

By Curt Garfield  
NEWS OUTDOOR EDITOR

Unless you've been connected with the Department of Defense Equipment Testing Laboratory (better known around these parts as Natick Labs), or worked in the High Adventure Program of the Boy Scouts of America, you've probably never heard of Sandy Bridges. But if you've done any camping, hiking, canoeing or boating, he's had an impact on your life. In some cases, equipment he designed may have saved your life.

Clyde Sanders Bridges was born in Arkansas in 1939, but his real love was the wilderness canoe country of northern Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan. He came to the Charles L. Sommers Canoe Base as a Scout in the late 50s, signed on as a guide in 1960, and never went home. He wound up serving 30 years on the National Staff of the Boy Scouts of America, much of it as Director of the Northern Tier High Adventure Program which trains and outfits crews of Scouts and Explorers for trips into the Boundary Waters wilderness areas.

Sandy discovered very quickly that running an outfitting base was a lot different from running a Scout camp. When you're 60 miles from the nearest road, a simple axe or knife cut or an upset canoe in white water can be deadly. While waiting to recover a submerged body along the Falls Chain in Quetico Provincial Park in Canada, he designed the three-piece Stearns personal flotation device (PFD) that is now the standard of the industry.

He noted that the PFDs available at the time were uncomfortable and that the kids, especially the one sitting in the middle of the canoe, wouldn't wear them. The three-piece model was not only more comfortable, but could be worn as an extra pad when portaging canoes and packs from lake to lake.

Sandy's relationship with the scientists at Natick Labs was a symbiotic one. He was designing a national winter camping program for the Boy Scouts of America and needed sophisticated cold weather survival gear. Natick needed a place to test its prototype equipment and an expert in winter survival to do the actual testing.

Consequently much of the equipment that is worn by our military troops today first saw the light of day on the backs of Scouts and Explorers spending a week in minus-40-degree temperatures on the Minnesota-Canada border. Sandy called the program Okpik, the Inuit word for the snowy owl.

Tents, packs, sleeping systems, winter clothing, stoves and innovative food packaging all fell under his critical eye. Manufacturers and the military both sought his advice. He was a frequent visitor at Natick, generally returning to Minnesota with crates of prototype gear to be tested. Many of his suggestions were incorporated into the final designs. In 1985, he travelled to Swedish Lapland where he worked with members of the Swedish Army's survival program in the first of many international collaborations. His most recent trip was to St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1995.

Sandy expanded the Northern Tier high adventure program by adding satellite bases at Bissett, Manitoba, and Atikoken, Ontario, which were made available to Canadian as well as American Scouts. He engineered a land swap between the Boy Scouts of America and the U.S. Forest Service so that, for the first time, Sommers Canoe Base was protected by a quitclaim deed.

Sandy Bridges died the day after Christmas after a year-long bout with lung cancer. His material assets were modest, but his real legacy was the tens of thousands of lives he touched through the development of outdoor equipment and the training programs at the many bases along the Northern Tier. He will be missed.

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...and from John Thurston, BSA Council Executive of Gulf Coast Council, TX and a Charlie Guide:

### **It's The Far Northland**



**That's a Calling...**



**Me Away.**



**Sandy Bridges completed his last portage on December 26, 1997.**

**Sandy, give a "Hol-Ry" to Cliff Hanson, Fred Moyer, Voldi Welch and the other "Charlie's Boy's" you come across paddling on that clear lake that lies beyond...**

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