

George Beverly Shea, Longtime Billy Graham Associate, Passes Away

George Beverly Shea, 104, of Montreat, North Carolina, soloist of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA), died this evening following a brief illness.

Since George Beverly Shea first sang for Graham in 1943 on the Chicago radio hymn program, "Songs in the Night," Shea has faithfully carried the Gospel in song to every continent and every state in the Union. Graham's senior by ten years, Shea devotedly preceded the evangelist in song in nearly every Crusade over the span of more than one-half century.

Shea was the recipient of ten Grammy nominations, a Grammy Award in 1965, and was presented with a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Grammy organization in 2011. He was also a member of the Gospel Music Association Hall of Fame (1978), and was inducted into the Religious Broadcasting Hall of Fame in February 1996. Shea was also inducted into the inaugural class of the Conference of Southern Baptist Evangelists' "Hall of Faith" in 2008.

"I first met Bev Shea while in Chicago when he was on Moody Radio," says **Billy Graham**. "As a young man starting my ministry, I asked Bev if he would join me. He said yes and for over 60 years we had the privilege of ministering together across the country and around the world. Bev was one of the most humble, gracious men I have ever known and one of my closest friends. I loved him as a brother. My prayer for his wife, Karlene, and his children, Ron and Elaine, is that God will strengthen them during this time."

Born in Winchester, Ontario, Canada, where his father was a Wesleyan Methodist minister, Shea's first public singing was

in the choir of his father's church. Between Crusade, radio, and television dates in many countries, he sang at hundreds of concerts and recorded more than 70 albums of sacred music. At age 23 he composed the music to one of his best known solos, "I'd Rather Have Jesus."

"Even though Bev was 10 years older than my father, he never acted his age," says Franklin Graham. "He was absolute fun to be with. Bev was one of the most gracious and unassuming men I have known. He was always encouraging and supportive, a man of deep faith and strong commitment to Jesus Christ."

Shea is survived by his wife, Karlene, and his children from his first marriage, Ronald and Elaine. He was preceded in death by his first wife, Erma, who died in 1976.

Ron, born in 1948 in Chicago, graduated from Trinity International University in Deerfield, Ill., in 1971. For more than 30 years, Ron has been an associate in Crusade ministry through the BGEA, assisting in preparatory work for evangelistic crusades involving Mr. Graham and more recently for Franklin Graham's ministry. He is married to the former Kathy Ford.

Details on the funeral service for Shea will be forthcoming.

To visit the George Beverly Shea memorial website, [click here](#).