

George Beverly Shea Remembered at Public Memorial Service

Billy Graham Crusades soloist George Beverly Shea, who passed away Tuesday at the age of 104, was remembered Sunday in a public memorial service at Anderson Auditorium in Montreat, N.C.

"This man's life can be summed up in a few simple phrases," said Dr. David Bruce, who offered the Scripture reading and meditation during the service. "The twinkle in his eye, the praise on his lips, the song in his heart, the length of his days and the joy of his Lord."

Beginning as the soloist for Billy Graham Crusades in 1947 in Charlotte, N.C., Shea sang with Billy Graham for nearly 60 years, until Graham's final Crusade in 2005 in New York City. Shea remained active with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA), singing at Franklin Graham Festivals in Charleston, S.C. (2008), and Knoxville, Tenn. (2008); Will Graham Celebrations in Paducah, Ky. (2007), and Gastonia, N.C. (2006); and events at the Billy Graham Training Center at The Cove in Asheville, N.C.

The memorial event was attended by nearly 1,000 friends and family, including Billy Graham, Franklin Graham and other associates of the ministry. During the service on Sunday afternoon, Cliff Barrows, longtime music director for Billy Graham Crusades, offered memories from decades of ministry served alongside George Beverly Shea.

"For more than 70 years, I had the privilege of introducing 'America's Beloved Gospel Singer,'" said Barrows. "And, oh, how the people would listen. Billy Graham said he'd rather hear Bev sing than anybody. So would we all."

Barrows continued, "We knew that whatever took place on the platform before Billy Graham spoke, in every city we visited, that Bev would be used by the Spirit of God to prepare the hearts of the people for the message and he would prepare Billy's heart to preach that message."

Shea was born on Feb. 1, 1909, in Winchester, Ontario, Canada, where his father was a Wesleyan Methodist minister. Between Crusades, 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."

Shea was the recipient of 10 Grammy nominations and 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 and Religious Broadcasting Hall of Fame.

Shea will be laid to rest on the grounds of the Billy Graham Library in Charlotte during a private ceremony Monday. The Billy Graham Library and grounds will be closed to the public and will reopen for visitors Tuesday.