

Steve Yestness “Gone But Not Forgotten” Article

Leadville, Colorado has turned out its share of treasure, mostly in the form of silver and other minerals. But one treasure was equal parts flesh, blood and mountain. Steve Yestness came to the Aluminum Womb and “Fun One” in the summer of 1969, and the legend began: fearless; indestructible; built like a mailbox; “ran, jumped and crashed harder than anyone.” When the snow came to the high country, the Ski Team beckoned and Steve followed the call...Tuesday – Sunday all winter long for his doolie year. Skiing was his life, and the stories would fill pages. I remember running into Steve in the hall, just after ordering my class ring. I asked what stone he had chosen. He said he wasn’t getting a ring—he could get a brand new pair of racing skis for the price. Ski Team captain while at USAFA, Steve captured 5th in the nation in the national downhill ski competition in 1969.

After graduation, Steve went into helicopters. Stationed at F.E. Warren AFB in Cheyenne, WY in 1976, Steve provided search and rescue services after the Big Thompson Flood just west of Loveland, CO. 143 people lost their lives. That number would have been much higher but for Steve’s courage, airmanship and dedication. Commanding numerous search and rescue missions over the years, Steve was credited with over 200 lives saved. Later in his career, using the leadership skills he learned (or at least absorbed) at the Academy, his abundant common sense, and a big dose of “work hard, play hard,” Steve turned a struggling helo squadron into a cohesive, mission-oriented team.

Steve came into his own when he got to Air Force Space Command headquarters. Assigned to work GPS (key to search and rescue), he had a knack of cutting through the technical jargon to get to the heart of the matter. He also introduced Space to Bubba, and eventually became known as Bubba, himself. The original Bubba came from a picture Steve had pinned to his cubicle of an orangutan in a tire swing. The caption said something like, “You better behave, or Bubba will put you in time out.” Steve started “threatening” people disagreeing in meetings with, “You better behave, or Bubba will have to put you in the tire.” It caught on with our boss, then-Brig Gen Marshal Ward, AFSPC Director of Requirements, who started using the phrase himself. Then, one day, Steve brought in a 2½-foot tall gorilla that one of his daughters had at home and a wheelbarrow tire. Steve sat the gorilla in the tire in a rolling desk chair and promptly rolled it into Gen Ward’s office. Gen Ward in turn pushed the chair over to the executive elevator and headed up to the Vice Commander’s office. Lt Gen Caruana was in a meeting. No matter. A small thing like a meeting wasn’t about to keep Bubba from making his debut. And so was born the official DR mascot. If you worked in DR, you were a Bubba, and the nickname stuck to Steve to the end. He passed away in his sleep on 22 Dec 09.

Steve and Brenda’s daughters, Astrid and Nissa, were his pride and joy. He instilled both a competitive and good-sport nature in the girls, and taught them to ski and play basketball and softball. He retired in 1999 in Colorado Springs after 26 years of service. He is survived by Brenda, his wife of 36 years; daughters Astrid and Nissa; mother, Jane; father, Don; and sister, Kristi.

Farewell, my friend. You’re sorely missed.

Mike Arnett, ‘73