William Buckwalter Smart

June 27, 1922 ~ January 25, 2018

Bill's remarkable life began June 27, 1922, as the fourth of six children born to Thomas Laurence and Nelle Buckwalter Smart. At the age of six, he was selling newspapers for a nickel on frigid Provo streets to help the family get by. At 50, he was busy transforming a conventional local paper into one of the nation's great dailies. At 95, he had lived the life of an explorer, historian, advocate, builder, athlete and seeker. He passed away, certain of joining his parents again, on January 25, 2018, after a long struggle with prostate cancer.

On his life's journey, Bill touched the minds and hearts of countless people ‚Äî equally comfortable interviewing world leaders, standing up to Utah's power brokers, or playing ping pong with his great-grandchildren.

Best known for his 40-year career at the Deseret News, culminating as editor and general manager from 1972 to 1988, Bill and his committed staff remade the paper into a powerhouse of investigative reporting, environmental awareness, cultural discernment and meaningful debate. Many believe that Utah journalism reached its apex under his leadership. Some, uncomfortable with the sunlight, preferred it the old way.

His news career is well-documented. But Bill proudly, lovingly, did so much more.

He worked nights while studying humanities and history at the rigorous liberal arts school, Reed College. World War II postponed his bachelor's degree for three years. Bill enlisted in the Army Reserve, was called to duty, and served a distinguished though thankfully non-combatant military career.

Although a "one-year-only" job with the Deseret News sidetracked his ambition to earn a doctorate and become a history professor, Bill's scholarly talents bore fruit decades later in many writings, including the award-winning books "Mormonism's Last Colonizer," a biography of his grandfather, William H. Smart; and "Over the Rim," co-authored with his wife, Donna, an account of the first Mormon expedition to Southern Utah in 1849,50.

More books, including "Utah: A Portrait" and "New Genesis: A Mormon Reader on Land and Community," reflected Bill's love of Utah's wildlands. Although he explored all seven continents, traveling as far as Denali, Machu Picchu, Annapurna, China's Great Wall, the Egyptian pyramids and Antarctica, Bill loved Utah best ‚Äî from the wildflowers of Albion Basin to the red rock of Canyonlands. On road trips, he knew the names of every mountain, creek and butte. He could tell you the forces that made them, the creatures that inhabit them, and the historic trails that cross them.

Yet another book, "Messages for a Happier Life," collected his essays of personal and spiritual guidance, inspired by his deep love of gospel principles. Bill first encountered Donna Toland speaking of her faith at an LDS church testimony meeting and decided on the spot that she was his one and only. They married; she helped rekindle his faith; and they grew in devotion to one another and to their church for 72 years. Bill and Donna served together on a church public affairs mission to Canada and New England, and worked together in the Salt Lake Temple.

Additionally, Bill served on the YMMIA and Sunday School general boards, as Bishop of the Federal Heights Ward, and in many other church roles.

Bill's 2016 autobiography, "Words and Action," recounts dozens of projects beyond his newspaper career. When you hike Capitol Reef National Park, wander the Jordan River Parkway, run the Deseret News Marathon, picnic at First Encampment Park, encounter monuments on the Pioneer Trail, ramble protected wildlands on the Colorado Plateau ,Äî think of Bill. His leadership helped make all of that possible, and more.

And if you play tennis, breathe a sigh of relief that you're not facing our fearsome Huntsman World Senior Games gold medalist and hall of famer. There's so much more we could tell. Join us and reminisce!

Visitation: Friday, Feb. 9, 5:30 to 7:30, Larkin Mortuary, 260 E. South Temple, SLC.

Funeral: Saturday, Feb. 10, 12:00, preceded by a visitation at 10:30, Federal Heights Ward, 1300 E. Fairfax Rd. (340 N. Virginia St.).

Graveside: Salt Lake City Cemetery.

Consider donating in Bill's memory to LDS Humanitarian Services, the Grand Canyon Trust, or your favorite advocacy group fighting on behalf of our irreplaceable western landscapes. Express condolences at www.larkinmortuary.com

Thanks to Bill and Donna's five children, 11 living grandchildren, 16 great-grandchildren and many others, near and far, whose love and assistance comforted Bill in his illness. Special thanks to Bill's home health nurse, Joel Dumond of Encompass Home Health, for his sensitive care and friendship.