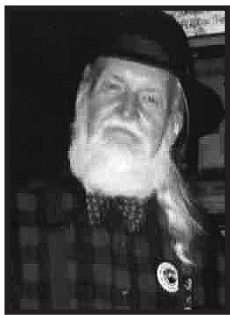


**OPEN FORUM**

# I'll never forget Bruce 'Utah' Phillips

By **JIM COOK**

Like train whistles echoing often in the Columbia River Gorge, so are thoughts of Utah Phillips. But the west-bound BN-SF freight train that passed through the Columbia River Gorge at Skamania on a late Spring afternoon seemed to carry the spirit of friend, Bruce 'Utah' Phillips. Why not, since I was enroute to his June 1 memorial service in Nevada City, Calif. The news of Phillips' death May 23 — just days after his 73rd birthday (he was born May 15, 1935) — hit hard. It seemed especially poignant receiving the sad news at the Northwest Folklife Festival



**UTAH PHILLIPS**

in Seattle. Amazingly, the festival featured a long-planned tribute concert, and it was the night of his passing.

Our band, General Strike, performed labor and social justice songs there May 24. Afterward, I listened to a phone message. It was Jimmy Kelly, a Santa Cruz, Calif., labor teacher and singer. In 1987 he started the annual Western Workers Labor Heritage Festival. There, I saw Utah several times. Once, in the late '90s, I photographed Phillips interviewing Pete Seeger. The phone message said,

"Brother Bruce Utah Phillips has left us and is singing with Joe Hill, Woody Guthrie, and Mother Jones."

Memories of his voice and laughter echo through the universe.

For some of us, dealing with death is tough. Though bracing for years, family and friends forever mourn. Each always hoping for another heartfelt conversation, or concert filled with radical songs, stories of wisdom and humor, or hilarious rants against the bosses and their politicians. We now dealt with death's reality.

Utah Phillips' congestive heart disease, which he valiantly fought for more than a decade, restricted the singing hobo's traveling. Known worldwide, those touched by his love for life, liberty, and social justice, understand Utah Phillips' rebel spirit, like Solidarity, is now global.

Nevada City, his beloved hometown in the Sierra Nevada foothills, held a public memorial June 1. Knowing Utah's keen interest in baseball (not major league), the Little League baseball field felt a perfect location to bid our comrade farewell and console each other. Banjo music greeted as the stage was set behind home plate. The entire infield, outfield, and bleachers filled quickly with family, friends, and local community. Genny Nelson, of Portland's Sisters of the Road Cafe, was there. Also, IWW fellow workers and radical labor singers from many places. On this sunny spring morning, Utah Phillips' life celebration opened with the ceremonial "first pitch" by local Little League

guers.

Many remember Utah's baseball passion, his music and stories of working class struggle and courage, folk music with message and oral histories shared. With smiles and tears we listened as family and friends shared insights of an amazing character and mentor to many. He cherished life, and had many pursuits, including family, poetry, folk music, labor history, the IWW, trains, tramping, gardening, well, you get the idea.

We laughed together retelling Utah's stories and countless practical jokes. Closing with Utah's powerful Hymn Song, together, in one big union, we sang through our hard time. We shall never forget Bruce Utah Phillips.

*(Editor's Note: Jim Cook is a retired member and past president of Letter Carriers Branch 82. He is a Portland labor activist and member of the band, General Strike.)*

## Boeing strike worth the fight for our future

**To The Editor:**

Let me just take the time to put my spin on the Machinists strike at Boeing.

I have been a Boeing employee going on 31 years at the plant in Gresham. I have six children — four under the age of 18 — who are dependent on my income and medical benefits.

I, along with my Machinist co-workers, lost eight weeks of income and medical benefits.

Just last night my 14-year-old son was playing high school football. Throughout the entire game I

was thinking: Play good, enjoy yourself, don't get hurt! We have no medical benefits until this strike ends.

My point is, was this strike worth it?

Yes, it was worth it every single worrying minute and lost sleep. It was a fight for our future and our children's future. All of the insulting takeaways that were first handed to us — the best aerospace workers in the world — was a disgrace. Boeing has a record backlog of airplanes to build, as well as record profits, rival to none in its

history.

With new and improved contract language on our most important issues — job security, medical benefits, and wages, this contract is worthy of the skills and dependency we deliver every single day.

Hopefully, Boeing won, too. We can work together collectively and continue to produce the safest and best airplanes in the world.

**Paul Mulligan**  
IAM 63  
Portland

**HOW LABOR CAN LIVE UNITED: JOIN HANDS. OPEN YOUR HEART. LEND YOUR MUSCLE. FIND YOUR VOICE. GIVE 10% GIVE 100% GIVE 110%. GIVE AN HOUR. THINK OF WE BEFORE ME. REACH OUT A HAND TO ONE AND INFLUENCE THE CONDITION OF ALL. GIVE. ADVOCATE. VOLUNTEER. LIVE UNITED™**



**United Way** 

United Way of the Columbia-Willamette

[www.unitedway-pdx.org](http://www.unitedway-pdx.org)

## We worked hard to build Freightliner

**To The Editor:**

May I speak from heart for a moment? Those @#\$%^&\*. Freightliner was born here, developed here. Freightliner was a Portland fixture, our company. We worked hard to make it special. It appears unfortunate now that Daimler ever bought the company because now where Freightliner once stood in Portland there will only be a big hole. Locally owned now has new meaning. People that live in far off places don't care. People that view the world through a balance sheet are cold.

Last year I recommended when Daimler decided to send the Freightliner brand down to Mexico, they should have been given a provisional business license to do business in Portland. Daimler's sense of entitlement to corporate mobility plays havoc on the lives of those left in the wake of companies like Daim-

ler that shop the world for cheap labor. There should be a price to be paid for the destruction of economy, a provisional business license. Call it a responsibility clause, where any company that fails in their humanity would be stripped of their corporate personhood and be denied a business license. After all, if the company is allowed to enjoy the rights of a person, they should act like one — act in a way that becomes a person with a family and a home.

Go ahead, walk away and give us the building. You owe us that much. We can make solar panels for the new world. As for your corporate personhood, it should be revoked for abandonment and neglect.

**Carroll Wikander**  
IAM Local 1005  
Portland

## ILWU pensioners honored Cook, too

**To The Editor:**

Thank you for the article about the 41st annual convention of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union Pacific Coast Pensioners Association held in Portland in September.

I would like to add that among the awards presented, Brother Jim Cook received the "Jesse and Lois Stranahan Award." Brother Cook is a retired letter carrier, past-president of the National Association of Letter Carriers Portland Branch 82, and longtime chair of the Northwest Oregon Labor Council's History Committee.

He is also my good friend and union Brother.

The plaque reads: "The ILWU Pacific Coast Pensioners Association Presents This Jesse and Lois Stranahan Award to Brother Jim Cook for his many years of dedication as

a Good Samaritan and his contributions as an avid union activist. September 16, 2008."

Each year since 2002, the ILWU PCPA has presented this award to a deserving union activist. Thanks to Brother Phil Lille, ILWU Local 23 in Tacoma, who suggested the award shortly after my husband, Jesse Stranahan passed away in 1998.

Brother Arne Auenin, of Longview ILWU PCPA Local 21, was the first to receive the award. He also spoke on behalf of Brother Cook.

In addition, I arranged other speakers on his behalf, including Sister Barbara Byrd, Brother Mike Sullivan, and Jesse and my daughter, Judith K. Stranahan, a union member and conductor on a freight rail line in New Jersey.

**Lois R. Stranahan**  
ILWU Retired  
Portland