



George Lloyd Lamb 1938-2020

George was related to several members of OBCGS including Randy Biddix, publisher of one of our genealogy books, "The Biddix Family, A Legacy that Endures." The following article appeared in the [Asheville Citizen Times](#) on 01 April 2020:

Buncombe's First Coronavirus Victim: loving family man, lifelong worker

Retirement just never really took with George Lloyd Lamb.

Whether he was helping special needs kids get to and from school or making necklaces for his daughter to sell at craft shows, Lamb had to keep a hand in the working world. And that was after a long career with Strawberry Hill Press, a label manufacturer in South Asheville where Lamb worked for three decades.

"Our Dad made sure his boys were known to be good workers," said Lamb's younger brother, the Rev. James Lamb, 79. "He worked hard at every job he ever had, and he took every job very seriously."

A native of Hot Springs in Madison County who grew up in Buncombe, Lamb also was an Army veteran, a former Sam's Club greeter and, most importantly, a loving and doting husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather.

The Leicester resident died March 28 at age 81, the first death in Buncombe County officially caused by COVID-19, the respiratory disease caused by the novel coronavirus. As of April 1, 22 people in the county had laboratory-confirmed cases of COVID-19, part of 1,587 people statewide with the disease.

A press release from Buncombe County Health & Human Services, designed to protect patient privacy, said simply, "The elderly individual died from complications associated with the virus on March 28, 2020, at Mission Hospital. To protect the privacy of the family, no further information about this patient will be released by BCHHS."

But his family would like the community to know that Lamb was much more than just an "elderly individual" with COVID-19, the frightening disease that would claim his life. The highly contagious virus has shut down most of country and struck fear in communities nationwide.

"We watch this on the news, and it seems so far away," James Lamb said, adding that it's easy to think it's just affecting big cities like New York or Los Angeles or Seattle. "Suddenly, it's in a smaller community, and then you bring it down to our family. Then it becomes so personal."

He also encourages people to adhere to social distancing protocols and stay home orders.

"People have got to be serious about this thing," Lamb said. "It has touched us in a unique way."

First and foremost, said his daughter, Terry Lamb Lance, her dad was a family man, a beloved "Papaw" to eight grandchildren and six great grandchildren.

Besides Lance, he's survived by his wife of 59 years, Virginia Israel Lamb; his son, Tracy Lamb of Leicester; and another daughter, Deanna Lamb. He's also survived by his brother and two sisters, Geneva Lamb of Asheville and Joyce Biddix of Hendersonville.

For George Lloyd Lamb, 81, family always came first. Lamb had eight grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. He became Buncombe County's first official COVID-19 fatality when he died March 28.

Before he died, Lamb was in Mission Hospital for seven days. But as the disease compromised and then shut down his lungs, Lamb declined to be intubated.

That allowed him to continue to talk with his wife via Skype, and to visit with his brother and children. They had to wear masks, gowns and glasses to sit with him in the intensive care unit, but they still were able to give Lamb the social interaction he always craved.

"At the end, he was on 100 percent oxygen," Lance said. "He told me, 'I am not ready to go.' I said, 'Daddy, I don't know what to tell you — when it's your time, you have to go.'"

On Sunday, March 15, Lance knew something was seriously amiss with her dad.

"He wouldn't get out of bed — he couldn't get out of bed — and it's not like him to stay in the bed," said Lance, who lives near her parents' place. "I brought a thermometer down here, and it had a reading of 107 — three times."

Organ failure can occur at that temperature in humans. Lance knows people will be skeptical of that reading, as was a friend she called to ask about it. "They said, 'That's not possible,'" Lamb said. "But I saw it on the thermometer."

Home thermometer or not, Lance knew they needed to drop his temperature. They put cold washcloths all over Lamb. "We got it down to 102.5," she said.

They called an ambulance, but the crew said it could be the flu. With concerns that Lamb might be exposed to something worse, he and the family decided he would stay home.

On Monday, they took him to the Charles George VA Medical Center, where they performed a nasal swab test for coronavirus. They knew the next day it wasn't the flu, but the test results for coronavirus would take several more days to come back.

Always frugal, Lamb also didn't want to incur the cost of an ambulance trip to Mission. But on Saturday, March 21, after no improvement, "I told him, I'm calling 911. You're going to the hospital," Lance said. Lamb remained in the hospital until he died on Saturday, March 28.

About three years ago, Lamb had a bad bout of pneumonia that had left his lungs compromised, and he also had to have a stent put in an artery to help with blood flow. Two years before that, he'd had a heart valve replacement. While his health was compromised, Lamb was tough.

"I had talked to him a couple of hours before his passing on Saturday," James Lamb said, noting that his brother had overcome three "real bad spells" that last week, and they hoped he might conquer this one, too. "Some of the family, we were able to go in and sit with him and talk a little bit Friday. He was in a tent-type thing, and you had to unzip the doors to go in, and you had to dress with gowns and masks."

Mission staffers "went the extra mile to make sure that was possible," Lamb said. Lance also praised the hospital nurses and other staffers for their compassion and care.

George Lamb rallied a few times during that week in the hospital and was able to go into a regular room briefly. One morning, Lance said, her Dad called and said, "I feel so good, I think I'm going to kick this."

But his lungs became overwhelmed with the pneumonia COVID-19 causes. Medical staff gave him morphine to ease the suffering. "He knew I was there," Lance said. "He went very peaceful." James Lamb knows how important it was for his brother to have that human connection with family before he died.

"He was a very loving father, very faithful to his family," Lamb said. "He took so much pride and joy in the family. Those children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren — there was no end to what he was would do for them. He just always took great joy in his family."

A 'social butterfly' who loved people, Lance said her father also loved working, even deep into retirement, mainly because he liked being around people.

A graduate of the former Biltmore High School, George Lamb spent four years in the U.S. Army, serving between the conflicts in Korea and Vietnam. Back at home, he embarked on a 35-year career at Strawberry Hill Press, a label maker, retiring at age 62. "He decided he did not like retirement," Lance said with a laugh. "He's a social butterfly, so he likes to be out in public."

Lamb spent five years working at Sam's Club as a greeter and stocker. Then he and his wife spent six years working as park rangers at a campground on Lake Keowee in South Carolina, setting up a camper for living quarters.

"His favorite job, though, was working as a transportation safety assistant on a school bus for the county's Progressive Education Program," Lance said. "I think that was his favorite job because he worked with special needs kids."

He worked that job for about five years, until heart troubles sidelined him three years ago. Lamb would help the kids get on and off the bus, and talk to them once they were moving.

While he couldn't continue with a formal job, Lamb took up jewelry making, creating metal heart necklaces Lance sold at craft shows. George Lamb was buried at Newfound Baptist Church, where he'd been a member for years.

"I couldn't go," Lance said, noting that she and other immediate family had to isolate themselves because of contact with Lamb. "Just a few people went. I did get in the car and sat in the car and watched where I could see a little bit. That was the hardest thing." Her mother — Lamb's wife of almost 60 years — couldn't attend, either.

As a clergyman himself, James Lamb, 79, said these are really tough times for families who have loved ones struggling with COVID-19. But he also knows a day will come when his family can gather and properly celebrate his big brother's life.

"We will have a memorial service as soon as we're all through this," Lamb said. "And I tell you this, we're going to have a hug-fest that day."