

Tragedy Leads to Scholastic Opportunities



Brad Loper

A tragic plane crash in 1987 that killed their son Don led Dick and Geri Wilberforce to establish the Don Wilberforce Memorial Scholarship. The first recipient of the scholarship has gone on to great success in the field in which Don was passionate.

The scholarship was presented for the first time in 1989 to Brad Loper, a Tascosa High School (Amarillo) graduate, who chose to pursue his photography studies at Amarillo College.

"Mr. Wilberforce told me early on that they wanted to help a young photographer get their education and their start, and that grades were important, but he understood there were

probably students like me who had some potential as a photographer, but who were not going to be at the top of their graduating class," Loper said.

When he decided to continue his studies at the University of Texas-Arlington, he reapplied and was awarded continuing funds.

"One of the great things about the Don Wilberforce Memorial Scholarship was that there was a real connection with the Wilberforces," Loper said. "It seems in a lot of cases a student will fill out an application, maybe interview with a committee and be given some background. I was fortunate to get to meet and then get to know the Wilberforces. I would come home from UTA for Christmas break or the summer and go by and see Mr. and Mrs. Wilberforce and show them some work from the past year and let them know how I was doing. The wonderful thing was not only the financial support, but more so the encouragement and support I could get from the Wilberforces."

After graduation, Loper took internships in Topeka, Kan., and Palm Beach, Fla., before landing a full-time position with the newly established *Arlington Morning News* in Texas.

The paper was going head-to-head with the *Fort Worth Star Telegram* and the assignments were tough. Loper took photos, edited pages and worked with designers.

"IT HAD TO BE A GOD THING THAT THE FIRST YOUNG MAN TO RECEIVE THE SCHOLARSHIP WOULD EARN A PULITZER."

When the paper folded, Loper's experience landed him another quick opportunity at the *Dallas Morning News*.

He took a staff photographer position and was on the job when Hurricane Katrina hit. He and 20 other DMN photographers took pictures for days. Later the paper chose his photo and some of the others for a Pulitzer Prize entry. He won.

"It had to be a God thing that the first young man to receive the scholarship would earn a Pulitzer," Geri said. "We're so proud of him and what he's accomplished."

Today, he serves as the photo editor of the *Dallas Morning News* and continues to receive accolades. In April 2008, he was named the National Press Photographers Newspaper Picture Editor of the Year.

He continues to work at *Dallas Morning News* and teaches courses at UTA. In April 2008, Brad was named the National Press Photographers Newspaper Picture Editor of the Year and has received two Emmy awards.