

RACING INTO THE WIND



With
this
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for
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one.

As many of you know, I am an avid fan of Formula One Grand Prix. Most do not know why. My father passed away when I was quite young, and my mother never remarried. There were two family friends that I looked up to and respected as examples of what a man should be, and how they should conduct themselves. One earlier in my childhood, and one later as I progressed through high school and college. The latter passed away this morning and I have just been apprised of that. At this moment, I don't know anything to do but write a short tribute and thank you to him.

The man is Philip Toll Hill. Phil was as unassuming a man as you could ever meet; yet larger than life itself. I have found one piece so far on the net to quote from, in the NYT:

Philip Toll Hill was born in Miami on April 20, 1927 to a prominent family. He was raised in Santa Monica, Calif., and studied business administration at the University of Southern California.

He quit school after two years and traveled to England, where he worked as a mechanic and then later as a driver. He landed a seat with Ferrari in 1955 for the 24 Hours of Le Mans. And when both Ferrari grand prix drivers, Luigi Musso and Peter Collins, died in separate races in 1958, Mr. Hill stepped

into the most coveted seat in motorsports, driving for Enzo Ferrari.

In 1961, Mr. Hill won the Formula One championship by a single point over his Ferrari teammate, Wolfgang von Trips, who died in Ferrari's final race of the year. Mario Andretti, who was born in Italy, is the only other American champion in Formula One.

...

"I'm in the wrong business," Mr. Hill once said. "I don't want to beat anybody, I don't want to be the big hero."

But Mr. Hill was the hero – and during the most dangerous era of Formula One. Death lurked around every corner and down every straight, and death played a part in his career, although he never had a serious injury. Along with his Formula One title, with Ferrari in 1961, he also won the 24 Hours of Le Mans three times and the 12 Hours of Sebring three times.

I met Phil through his wife Alma, who was one of my mother's closest friends long before meeting and marrying Phil. They are literally the finest people I have ever met and known in my life. It was with Phil that I would go work with restoring antique and classic automobiles in Santa Monica during summers. You may recall a reference to this summer experience from this post.

Simply from osmosis I learned so much about all things mechanical and automotive, but more importantly, every aspect of life from Phil. Without ever trying to, he had as profound an influence on me, in so many ways, that it is hard to describe. I owe a debt of gratitude to this wonderful man. Phil is survived by Alma, son Derek, daughter Vanessa and step-daughter Jennifer.

So, as you cheer the truly transformational event tonight, and the nomination of Barack Obama is absolutely that, please also raise a glass in toast to Phil Hill, he was truly an American legend and lion, and he carried our colors to the world championship on the biggest of stages in world sport. Arrivederci my friend.