

Fight 'em, Fella

THE LEGACY OF
GEORGE P. MITCHELL '40

“To give away money is an easy matter, and in any man’s power. But to decide to whom to give it, and how large and when and for what purpose and how, is neither in every man’s power nor an easy matter. Hence it is that such excellence is rare, praiseworthy and noble.” —ARISTOTLE

“Met a cute soldier today,” Cynthia Woods Mitchell wrote in her diary to recap the fateful day in 1941 when she first encountered Texas A&M University distinguished petroleum engineering graduate and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Lt. George P. Mitchell '40.

In the course of a train ride back to Houston after watching his beloved Aggies get outscored at Kyle Field, the ever-enterprising George Mitchell managed to snatch victory from the jaws of national-championship-derailing defeat: He traded seats to meet the girl of his dreams who would become his wife two years later.

Our Most Generous

Mitchell, an unflagging optimist with the uncanny knack to recognize and maximize opportunity, not only for and in himself but also for and in others, passed away July 26, 2013, at the age of 94. He left the world better than he found it—and in the process created an extraordinary legacy—by working persistently on a multitude of ventures. He and Cynthia, who preceded him in death in 2009, raised 10 children and realized a lifetime of dreams, fueled mostly by their infi-

nite capacity not to know what couldn't be done—or simply to persevere in spite of all evidence to the contrary. Partners in business, philanthropy and community service, they epitomized not only the American dream but also the potential payoff, individual and societal, made possible by the most basic of all marriages: perseverance and hard work.

The Mitchells' visionary contributions to Texas A&M include a \$20 million legacy gift in 2012 to benefit their namesake institute that solidified their position as the university's all-time most generous donors. Their commitments, which exceed \$95 million, have benefited countless Aggies and areas ranging from physics and astronomy to tennis and Texas A&M Galveston, each a passion since his childhood.

Everyday Genius

But Mitchell was so much more than those gifts, generous and visionary as they are. He was an everyday genius who valued education as both an equalizer and a game-changer, who recognized the inherent power of relationships and in relating, who embraced the energizing potential of being



The George P. and Cynthia Woods Mitchell Institute for Fundamental Physics and Astronomy, along with the George P. Mitchell '40 Physics Building, was dedicated in December 2009 as the first campus buildings to be financed through a public-private partnership involving substantial donor funds.

all-in, and who realized the absolute beauty of making a humble yet heartfelt contribution.

Wildcatter Spirit

Mitchell overcame poverty and the loss of his mother at 13 by holding tightly to her dream for a quality education for him and his three siblings. Although she had hoped for a doctor, one summer spent with his older brother Johnny drilling oil wells in Louisiana was all it took to unleash the spirit of a wildcatter and an Aggie legend in the making. He made the most of Texas A&M's land-grant mission of ensuring access to educational empowerment, taking 23 hours each semester to complete a five-year petroleum engineering and geology program in four years and graduating first in his class.

In between, "Greek" Mitchell, as his classmates called him, found time to captain the men's tennis team and to serve as battalion commander of the Texas A&M Corps of Cadets B Battery while largely funding his own college education in the days before endowed scholarships.

As founder of Mitchell Energy & Development Corp., Mitchell capital-

ized on his ability to find oil and natural gas where no one else could. Relying on borrowed geological survey maps and a trademark sense of timing, he turned the company into one of the largest independent oil and gas producers in the nation before he sold it to Devon Energy Corp. for \$3.5 billion in 2002. Along the way, he pioneered shale gas technology, perfecting the technique of horizontal drilling with a light sand frac to unlock a new energy source and revolutionize the United States' energy future while fundamentally changing the world.

True Vision

Mitchell has been described as someone who could see far and connect the dots, constantly anticipating where the world would, could or should be in 30 years and doing his level best to figure out how to help it get there.

In many ways, Mitchell never outgrew his humble beginnings and those hardscrabble years that were as much a part of him as were the millions he gave to educational, community and philanthropic efforts. He never rested on his laurels nor flaunted them, opting to travel by personal car, fly coach

and eat fast food more often than fine dining. He perfected the art of the match, ensuring that people were as invested in their causes as they asked him to be and guaranteeing greater dividends across the board. He also made certain those lessons conveyed to the next generation, making his family the bedrock of the business and involving them in every step of the process, from regular strategy sessions to succession discussions.

Today all 10 Mitchell children are represented in the Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation, led since 2011 by their granddaughter Katherine Lorenz, who serves as president. Her mother, Sheridan Mitchell Lorenz, serves as the family's Mitchell Institute liaison. In 2011 Sheridan Lorenz established the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Undergraduate Scholarship for Women in Physics to benefit full-time female students pursuing physics and astronomy degrees at Texas A&M. To date, the Mitchell family and the Mitchell Foundation has distributed or pledged more than \$400 million in grants to causes, programs and institutions—an estimated 90 percent of which is related to science and sustainability-related fields and programs.

From astronomy to sustainable communities, Mitchell never let go of his dreams nor his inner motivator, constantly encouraging, inspiring and even cajoling those around him to "fight 'em, fella" and to push the envelope just a little further than they ever thought possible. While he never got the opportunity to see what is out there at the edge of the universe, George Mitchell certainly ensured the possibility for future generations willing to bank on themselves. ☺

—BY SHANA HUTCHINS '93

Watch the online tribute to George P. Mitchell '40 at give.am/MitchellTribute.



The late George P. Mitchell '40

George P. Mitchell '40 Remembered

He's been referred to as a giant. A genius. A gentleman. There is no doubt he was all of those. George P. Mitchell was also my grandfather—an incredibly kind, generous, loving man whom I greatly admired.

He was the smartest, most humble person I have ever known. And certainly the most stubborn! When he believed in something, he took great risks to follow his heart and to reach his goals. I learned—and will continue to learn—a great deal from him. He profoundly influenced my worldview and many of the life choices that cultivated my path. My grandfather always encouraged me to follow my dreams and to pursue my own passions, and I am most grateful for that undying support.

Champion of Sustainability

One of my most enduring memories of my grandfather is one that also defines his legacy. I heard him say on numerous occasions, “If you can’t make the world work with 6 billion people, then how will you make it work with 10 billion people—and what are you going to do about it?” One may be surprised to learn that my grandfather was an early believer in and supporter of environmentally friendly growth. Until the day he died, he talked about the future—10, 20, 100 years into the future—and questioned how we could create a better, more sustainable world. That was my grandfather: the pragmatic visionary and the unconven-

tional yet ordinary guy doing extraordinary things. And, always with a call to action.

Belief That We Can Do Better

Like many innovators, my grandfather was inspired in the 1960s by Buckminster Fuller, who understood that the earth is finite while the human population keeps growing. To sustain our environment, our communities and economic infrastructure, we must do more with less.

In the mid 1970s, after developing The Woodlands, Dennis Meadows’ seminal “Limits to Growth” inspired my grandfather to take action and to apply his entrepreneurial spirit to the issue of global sustainability. Meadows’ narrative addressed the twin problems of population growth and resource depletion, concluding that the path forward at then-current rates of consumption was unsustainable.

My grandfather understood the challenge of humans and nature co-existing in a market-driven economy. As a risk-taking capitalist, he certainly was not naïve to the marketplace. However, he always believed that the collective “we” could do better. In fact, doing better was the common thread

George P. Mitchell '40





Katherine Lorenz, president of the Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation and granddaughter of the late George P. Mitchell '40.

that weaved together so much of his and my grandmother's lives.

That global, long-term way of thinking helped validate and define my grandfather's approach to business, his views toward our existing socio-economic system and his investments in philanthropy.

As such, he taught me that you can't solve the world's problems alone—you must find partners who will invest with you. He also taught me to think boldly—to have the same appetite for risk and to bring that same entrepreneurial spirit to the world of philanthropy that he had in business.

The Mitchell Brand of Philanthropy

I am fortunate to have so many great leadership examples within my own family who are dedicated to making the world a better place.

My aunt Meredith Dreiss served as president of the Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation from 1992 to

2011. During this time, the foundation initiated many of the investments made in Texas A&M University. Upon her retirement in 2011, I was elected president of the foundation.

My mother, Sheridan Mitchell Lorenz, has been a constant example of pioneering drive, support and advocacy for a number of causes, from her work with my grandparents' namesake Mitchell Institute for Fundamental Physics and Astronomy to her push to honor my grandmother's memory with an endowed scholarship in her name ensuring educational opportunities for women pursuing careers in physics at Texas A&M.

The foundation's resources are small compared to the challenges we address, but we do our best to invest carefully as we practice a new kind of philanthropy—one that is strategic in seeking out and supporting innovative leaders, thinkers and organizations as engines of change in both policy and

practice in Texas. We strive to support high-impact projects at the nexus of environmental protection, social equity and economic vibrancy.

In the long term, I would love to see the foundation carry on the kind of philanthropy my grandfather did. He was a visionary; he was bold; he was entrepreneurial; and he was risk-taking. He took the long view, knowing that we could get there—it would just take time, energy, the right resources and sheer perseverance. I want to see our foundation apply that same spirit to massive social issues, knowing that it takes time, long-term investment and a real vision for a different type of world.

I hope many more people will be touched by my grandfather's legacy, in the way he touched so many throughout his life. His was the quintessential American story, one that flew in the face of convention—a story that will continue to influence generations to come. He was the epitome of William James' famous call to action, "Act like what you do makes a difference. It does." 🌸

—BY KATHERINE LORENZ
PRESIDENT
CYNTHIA AND GEORGE MITCHELL
FOUNDATION

To learn more about the Mitchell Foundation, visit CGMF.org or follow @MitchFound on Twitter.