

**A Memorial for E. Victor Milione
Arlington, Virginia, April 11, 2008**

**Lee Edwards
Distinguished Fellow in Conservative Thought, The Heritage Foundation**

He was a wise man. In the wake of Barry Goldwater's crushing defeat in 1964, I phoned Vic and asked, "What do we do now?" He replied: "Man does not live by politics alone."

Earlier that year, he wrote to Gerhart Niemeyer at Notre Dame, observing that the election of a conservative as president would mean little "without an increase in the effort to restore the root values of our civilization in the intellectual center of American life." He conceded that such a restoration was "a tremendous task" but not an impossible one because, he said, quoting Tocqueville, "every fresh generation is a new people."

Vic's memory was prodigious. In a single conversation, he would quote *in extensio* John Henry Newman, Tocqueville, Seneca, Jacob Burckhardt, Gordon Chalmers, Ortega y Gasset, and Richard Weaver, his favorite modern conservative writer. "Vic may not have been the most quoted conservative," quipped one ISI staffer, "but he was certainly the most quoting."

He was a good judge of people. Consider some of those whom he hired during his nearly three decades as ISI president: M. Stanton Evans, Don Lipsett, John Lulves, Wayne Valis, Robert Reilly, Robert Ritchie, Ken Cribb, Robert Schadler, Christopher Long, Gregory Wolfe. He constantly sought to challenge the young people around him. Before visiting a major donor, Wayne Valis recalls that Vic stressed one thing: "Remember the mission—educating for liberty. If they start saying we should strive for 'relevance,' ignore them." Vic paused, then said emphatically, "I hate relevance!"

Consider as well those distinguished thinkers and writers whom he persuaded to speak, often for nothing, at ISI programs: Richard Weaver, Russell Kirk, Gerhart Niemeyer, Allan Bloom, Irving Kristol, Bill Buckley, Ludwig von Mises, Milton Friedman, Frank Meyer, Eric Voegelin, George Carey, Walter Berns, F. A. Hayek, Harry Jaffa, Mel Bradford, and many more. The names reveal the breadth of Vic's encompassing vision—his belief that ISI should pass along to the rising generation *all* the ideas of the West. He often quoted Richard Weaver to the effect that students are not "objects" but individuals. They should not be used to achieve any political end; rather, they should be allowed to develop their own intellectual abilities and cultural interests. Students are themselves the end, and ISI existed for their sake.

Vic was a mentor as well as a boss, recalls Brig Krauss, his longtime secretary. Almost every morning at the cramped ISI offices in the Public Ledger Building in downtown Philadelphia he would step out of his office to begin a conversation with someone about a book or article he had read, and soon everyone would be standing in a doorway or leaning against a wall, listening to him. "It was like a little seminar," Brig remembers.

Vic was a prudent man, accomplishing organizational and intellectual miracles with a modest annual budget that never exceeded \$1 million. The pattern of making do with little was established early. As an ISI organizer in the early 1950s, Vic would drive from campus to campus in a car filled with pamphlets and books. His *total* expenses for three days of travel in November 1953 came to \$54.97. His breakfasts were 75 cents, total, his lunches 90 cents, his dinners \$2.10. His motel room for two nights was \$5.05. The single largest item was \$31.60 for gasoline.

He would meet with ISI members on a campus, pass out literature, and enlist new members by a somewhat unorthodox method. He would walk down a campus sidewalk with a large “Taft for President” button on his lapel and wait for someone to strike up a conversation. If the student was friendly and smiling, he was a potential ISI member. If the student was combative and frowning, that gave Vic an opportunity to do what he loved to do—teach. As Vic explained why he preferred Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio—who had said in 1951 that the choice for the nation was liberty or socialism—he would discuss not only current politics, but American history, the founding of the republic, the glories of Western civilization, and as much else of the history of mankind as the student was willing to take in. Even if they did not agree with him, young people listened to Vic Milione because he took the time to talk and listen to them.

He was a modest man. He was, in Bill Buckley words, “possessed of humility of heart and followed a singular policy of self-effacement.” At a 1980 testimonial dinner for him in Washington, D.C., Vic said that the idea for ISI “was not mine but that of Frank Chodorov” and was predicated on the belief that education sets the tone of society. Many people, he noted, particularly in Washington, “like to think that politics leads the country, but it does not. The future is largely determined by the ideals and theories citizens acquire in youth.”

When asked how to preserve liberty, the essential American ideal, he replied that liberty “requires good character, integrity, responsibility, self-discipline, initiative, and perseverance.” I can think of no better way to sum up Vic Milione, a champion of liberty, than to borrow his words and say that he was a man of good character, integrity, responsibility, self-discipline, initiative, and perseverance.

And of mischievous wit. When I asked him if he liked my history of ISI, filled with his quotations, observations, and excerpts from his letters, he responded: “I should. I wrote most of it.”