

Alfred "Al" J. Samter - January 27, 1922 – January 12, 2003

*The following was compiled from the statements in the **Cal Project Award Booklet** – November 22, 2002, and the **USWA District 7 News & Agitator** Vol. 2 Issue 1 Winter 2003 and an article in the February 1, 2003 issue of **The People's Weekly World**.*

Al Samter was born and grew up in the Bronx of New York City. He worked for a famous photographer who showed him how the darkroom could make the rich and famous look good. After WWII he worked in a record shop and at radio station WHOM in New Jersey with his father who was a newsman. Al remained close to his father who died in 2000 a few weeks short of his 102 birthday.

On the first day of spring in 1949 Al married Edythe and few months later they came to the Calumet Region where he went to work in the coke plant of the sprawling Gary Works of U S Steel. The newlyweds settled in Gary where Al quickly became active in Local 1014 of the United Steelworkers as a shop steward.

Al & Edythe had two daughters - Judythe and Kit. Unfortunately in 1965 Edythe died too young at 45. Al was also a loving and proud grandfather to Rob and Shannon and great grandfather to Emily, Zachary, Mason, and Madison.

During a 37-year career as a union activist, Samter served as an Assistant Grievance Committeeman, Grievance Committeeman, Secretary of the Human Relations Committee, Secretary of the Civil Rights Committee, and Editor of the Local 1014 Journal and was a member of the National Steelworkers Rank & File Committee.

Over this same period Al was an active participant in numerous local, district and national union election campaigns, most notably the campaigns by Ed Sadlowski for District 31 Director and for USWA International President.

In the 1970's, he co-chaired a rank and file group committed to giving basic steel workers the right to ratify contracts, and opposing the ENA no-strike agreement.

Upon his retirement in 1987, he joined the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR) chairing the PAC Committee, editing the chapter newsletter, and finally becoming President which he was serving as at the time of his death.

Al inspired large numbers of retirees to go to many solidarity rallies and bus trips to Washington D.C.

Al also served for several years on the Board of Directors of the Calumet Project participating in both the Project's efforts to obtain language in tax abatement ordinances that protect the wages, benefits and working condition of employees, and in the Project's *Labor Education in the Schools* program.

In February of 1958 Al and five others were called before the House Un-American Activities Committee that had come to Gary looking for Communists in the steel industry and Steelworkers Union. True to his beliefs and his friends and co-workers he refused to testify.

George Edwards, presently editor of *Old Timer*, the official publication of SOAR, said, "Under Samter, the SOAR chapter in Northwest Indiana was the most active in the country. Many of their resolutions to our national convention were incorporated into the SOAR program on the issues of the day." Edwards said Samter was to have been presented with the Pioneer Award at the upcoming SOAR convention, "Now we'll have to give it posthumously."

Curtis Strong, one of the First African Americans appointed to the USWA staff described Samter as a "damn good man." Strong said Samter was "a friend in need" When Strong and other Black steelworkers were demanding a "better shake" from the then leaders of the USWA. "I loved him dearly."

Ruth Needleman, professor of Labor History at Indiana University, invited Samter to speak to her classes on several occasions. "Few people understood the theoretical and practical demands of organizing like Al did and fewer still had either his experience or understanding when it came to dealing with interracial relationship on the job and in the union." Like others, Needleman remarked on his dedication and perseverance. "Nothing stopped him," she said.

Early on, Samter, who had been a table tennis hustler in his youth ("There weren't too many opportunities for a poor kid from the Bronx," he would explain.), developed an appreciation for jazz. "I couldn't afford tickets, so I got on good terms with the doorman at clubs and, when that didn't work, I'd find another solution," he often said.

Samter's granddaughter, Shannon McGuire, remembers him as a "very human, human being who loved his two grand children and four great grand children. "When we came to his house he would play his favorite records and dance around the room entertaining us."

Like most young men of his age, Samter served in the armed forces during World War II, seeing action in the Battle of the Bulge.

Samter was a great story-teller with, as often as not, himself being the goat. "I was driving the lead Jeep in the second half of a long convoy," he would say. "We were in the middle of nowhere in the middle and ran smack dab into a terrific dust storm. When the truck ahead of me turned, I went straight ahead and the rest of the trucks followed. We didn't get straightened out until daylight when they sent a search plane out to find us. From all the hell I caught you'd think I'd lost half the army!"

Program

**Jazz Music from Al's collection
and
Refreshments**

- 1. Reading of the printed remembrance**
- 2. Remarks from: Not necessarily in this order**
 - **Family**
 - **Co-Workers**
 - **USWA 1014**
 - **District 7**
 - **SOAR**
 - **NW IN Federation of Labor**
 - **Friends**

A CELEBRATION AND REMEMBRANCE OF THE LIFE AND WORK OF

**Alfred “Al” J. Samter
January 27, 1922 – January 12, 2003**

By His Family, Friends and Co-Workers

**Sunday February 9, 2003
At
USWA 1014 Union Hall
Gary, Indiana**