

Roy Lee Hight

Polio survivor, active in Democratic Party

Roy Lee Hight, a polio survivor who was active in the state Democratic Party in the 1960's, died Monday, September 13, 2004, at his Fort Worth home, said family friend Jerry Gardner of North Little Rock.

The cause of death is unknown. He was 64.

Hight was raised in Paris until age 8, when he was stricken with polio. His family moved to Little Rock so Hight could be closer to Arkansas Children's Hospital.

Polio didn't cripple him, but it did ravage the muscles in his arms, shoulders and upper body, making it impossible for Hight to raise his arms.

Hight had enough strength in his fingers that he could hold a pencil at a desk or pick up the telephone if he was standing.

Hight became student body president at West Side Junior High School, an office he was elected to for three years.

When he gave speeches before the school auditorium, he dressed in a suit and tie, his right arm gripping podium, his left dangling stiffly by his side.

Hight had to find creative ways to do normal things other students took for granted.

"In order to get his arm on the desk, he had to swing it," said Hight's friend Jack Singleton of North Little Rock. "He would get it swinging with his pencil in those four fingers. Once he got the other arm swung up, he could hold the paper."

At Little Rock Central High School, Hight wrote a sports column for the school newspaper and had friends in almost every clique, including two boys who helped carry his books between classes.

"They described it as an honor," Singleton said. "Roy Lee's friendships crossed all traditional lines. He was approachable and he was warm."

When he attended Little Rock University, Hight edited the sports section of the *Forum* and was a member of the Sigma Nu fraternity.

After graduating from Little Rock University, Hight campaigned in Arkansas for Democratic Party candidates and was president of the Arkansas Young Democrats Club.

He was also the secretary to U.S. Representative Wilbur D. Mills and executive secretary of the Arkansas Democratic Party in the 1960's.

In 1968, he drove a car for the first time – with his feet at the steering wheel.

At 28, Hight bought his first car that he steered by rotating a large metal disk on the floor with his left foot. He shifted gears by moving a pedal with his right foot.

He quit politics for a public relations job at his alma mater, where he became the assistant director of information and alumni affairs.

Hight moved to Texas with his family in the 1970's for a job with the social security administration and then moved to Fayetteville in the early 1990's.

A few months ago, he moved to Fort Worth to be closer to family after a polio related illness, Gardner said.

When he attended his 40 year Central High reunion in 1997, Hight was afraid none of his classmates would remember him, but he was wrong.

“When he walked in, they gave him a standing ovation,” Gardner said.