



Dr. Kenneth W. Kirstein

April 30, 1946 - August 14, 2022

Dr. Kenneth W. Kirstein, DVM.

April 30th, 1946—August 14th, 2022

Kenneth W. Kirstein, 76, died peacefully of natural causes in his Illinois home. He is survived by Mary Jane his devoted wife of 52 years, their four sons (three of whom are married), and twelve grandchildren: Joel (Sara): Katherine, Jonah, Annie, Jonathon, Joseph, Molly, and Lucy; Jason; Gabriel (Jenny): Tayven and Delani; Micah (Nicole): Steve, Thomas, and Caleb.

On April 30th, 1946, Kenneth was born the youngest of two sons of Albert and Martha Kirstein in Coulee Dam, WA. Although there was an eight-year difference between Ken and his older brother Delmar, they formed a close-knitted bond which remained for their entire lives.

During Ken's formative years, the Kirsteins settled in Odessa, WA, where small-town values were instilled. Brought up in the Christian faith, Ken and his family attended three weekly services, exposing him to Sacred Scripture. There was a steadfast love and warmth amongst his menage, and joyous music often filled their home. Ken was musically talented and made any brass instrument sound sweet. He even played slide trombone in the The Oom Pas & Mas, a traditional German band, at Expo '74: Spokane World's Fair.

Ken was an outdoorsman—camping in the Cascade Mountains, hunting waterfowl, and fishing for trout in Crab Creek—all pastimes he shared with his four boys. He appreciated nature’s beauty and favored its solitude. In the stillness of “God’s First Book,” Ken developed a contemplative interior life and his notable quiet strength.

Growing up on a wheat farm, Ken’s work ethic was nurtured by discipline and the virtue of industriousness. Not only was he skilled with hand and power tools, he operated at an early age an International TD-9 tractor and a Massey Harris 21 harvester. Each machine was without a cab, so he would wrap his t-shirt around his face to limit the dust he breathed in. The time spent farming grounded him in practicality when his mind later rose to the loftiness of the intellectual life.

Most importantly, Odessa was where he met his wife, Mary Jane. Although, according to him, he was too busy hunting and fishing to pay much attention to her during high school. But, with a smile on his face, he would playfully recount, “I certainly noticed her.”

He was recruited to play college basketball at Eastern Washington University. There, he courted Mary and joined Army ROTC. After graduating, Ken was commissioned as an officer in the US Army with the Medical Service Corps and received orders for Germany, where he became a company commander in charge of over 150 men. While stationed in Germany, Ken and Mary were married and travelled across Europe, fostering their love of history.

After the Army, Ken went into veterinary medicine. Adding a science degree to his bachelor of arts, Ken further received a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree from Washington State University (WSU), after which he entered a veterinary practice. His love of study prompted him to undergo post graduate research at WSU. His findings of an experimental drug’s effects on a parasitic

infection in cattle were published in the medical journal *Veterinary Medicine / Small Animal Clinician* and were presented at the 60th Annual Meeting of Research Workers in Animal Disease. He was chosen for membership into a national honor society of veterinary medicine and received awards in Small Animal surgery and Large Animal medicine by the Department of Clinical Medicine and Surgery. Ken spent over twelve years in higher education and was a researcher at heart. He joked that he would go for another twelve, but he couldn't support a family on a student's salary.

Returning to the Army as a veterinarian, he rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel before receiving an honorable discharge. His awards include but not limited to Meritorious Service Medal, Army Commendation Medals, Army Achievement Medals, National Defense Service Medals, Army Service Ribbon, Overseas Service Ribbon, Expert Marksman Badge, and orders to active service in support of Operation Desert Shield/Storm.

After his second stretch in the Army, the family settled in Herscher, IL because it reminded Ken and Mary of Odessa's small-town values. Here, Ken worked as a USDA Veterinary Medical Officer for 30 years, dealing mostly with research hospitals and zoos across the Midwest. In retirement, Ken enjoyed woodworking, restoring his 1900's home, and Mary's "honey-do-list," which largely entailed the Herscher museum.

Any career or military accomplishment was secondary to his vocation as husband/father. He poured himself into his marriage with Mary and focused on rearing his boys into virtuous men, all with the hope of being reunited in heaven. His sacrifice and love for family, his solicitude for others, his keen intellect and wisdom, his gentleness and humor, his humble and reflective soul were so hidden from outside acclaim that only those who loved him can properly attain his impact. As a loved one said of Ken, "He is the most

principled man I have ever met.”

His principledness guided him to follow the truth without reserve, which profoundly shaped his life. The same studiousness in research was put forth examining the truths of religion, whereby he studied his way into Catholicism. For him, the faith is not merely an inheritance, but something that must be reasoned to and fought for. He had devotions to the Rosary and the Sacred Heart of Jesus, loved the Traditional Latin Mass, and observed “lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi,” roughly, “How one prays is how they will believe and live.”

On August 18th, 2022, a Requiem Mass was offered at St. Joseph Catholic Church in Rockdale, IL, and he was buried with military honors at Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery.

Memorial: Herscher Historical Society.

Arrangements by Clancy-Gernon Funeral Home in Bourbonnais.

Cemetery Details

Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery

20953 Hoff Road
Elwood, IL 60421