



Lowell Gene Wilkey

February 16, 1936 - May 28, 2013

Mr. Wilkey died May 28 th, at his country home located at Historic Flickerville. He was born in Mt. Vernon, IL, the second of the three children of Frank and Hazel (Nance) Wilkey. He lost his beloved mother to death as a small boy. His father, a professional musician remarried Donna Veuve of Elgin, Illinois, whereupon Gene spent his remaining childhood in northern and southern, Illinois. He received his early education in Mt. Vernon, then country school east of Manteno followed by fifth grade at Our Lady Academy, while his parents were employed at Manteno State Hospital, until as a pre-teen Gene's life merged with what became a treasured memory: living and working on the farm with Joe and Eleanor Striegel in rural Manteno. While thriving there, he experienced a country school education just up the road at Deselm. He graduated from Manteno High School, Class of 1954, and enrolled at Southern Illinois University, where he completed his freshman year. While in the ROTC program at SIU, he was named captain of the rifle team. His team went on to win the Mid-U.S. Championship at Camp Kemper, 1955, in Boonsville, MO. He then enlisted in the United States Air Force and was selected to enter the Nuclear Weapons Mechanical Specialist Program, members of which were granted top level security clearance. He rose to Instructor Class level of the 3424th Special Weapons Squadron, which operated as part of the U.S "Cold War" NDP/ Nuclear Deterrent Program. On his two tours of duty in England, he enriched his experience to fly to Europe on select weekends, to visit historic destinations. In 1957, he received notice

of appointment to the USA Force Academy by Congressman, Les Arends-- with alternate status. Following his four years in the service, Gene and Mary Elmira Smith of Manteno married in 1960 and moved to Urbana, Il. where Gene attended the University of Illinois to complete his academic studies before being employed by the Roper Corporation, in Kankakee, Illinois, where he subsequently developed the first quality control test lab and began his quality control engineering career with Roper, Kankakee Division. In a twenty five year hiatus from industry, Gene and his wife engaged in farming, rearing their six sons in the agricultural lifestyle that Gene cherished in his teen years. They left off farming at the time of the national "Farm Crisis" and Gene returned to industry with the quality control engineering position at Jemco Corporation, Minooka, IL during which time, he designed and directed the testing of indicator lights for a broad spectrum of industrial application and set new quality standards in the field. In this capacity, he took on the responsibility of quality control management for company plants in Canada and Mexico. Gene retired from Illinois Tool Works/Jemco and went on to pursue his interest and talent in design, hand crafting original wood creations, for use indoors and of outdoor variety--the largest, his interpretation of a Japanese "moon bridge" that he installed to span the stream at the Wilkey homestead. Mr. Wilkey is survived by his wife Elmira, their six sons and daughters-in-law, Anthony, IL; Eric (Lisa), AZ; Martin (Vicki), IN; Barry (Carolyn), IL; Tad (Katie), MN ; Jeremy (Kim), IL., his sister, Mary Ann Heidbreder, GA , cousins Robert Wilkey, IL, and Shirley Payne, IL., sister-in-law, Suzanne and her husband Paul Pruchnicki, of Bourbonnais. He was grandfather, "Papa Gene" to twelve grandchildren: Brittany, Andrew, Nathan, Ian, Claire, Sydney, Liam, Kaleb, Rebekah, Charlotte, Isabelle and Olivia, uncle to nieces, Lisa Wilkey, ID, and Charlotte Granzow Caron, WA, and nephews: Scott Wilkey, MN , Peter and John Heidbreder, GA, and H.J. Granzow, IA. His parents, Frank and Donna Wilkey are deceased as is his brother and sister-in-law, Frank Jr, and Kathy Wilkey, and brother-in-law Carl Heidbreder. Gene served on the Board of the Kankakee County Farm Bureau as representative of Rockville Township while

farming, was a former volunteer leader for the Manteno Jr. High School Junior Great Books and a board member of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, St. Joseph Parish, Manteno, IL. A lifetime characteristic of Gene Wilkey was his enthusiasm for aviation. He proudly earned his private pilot's license under the instruction of Delbert Koerner of Koerner Aviation, Kankakee, and enjoyed cloud hopping over the farm... Gene was an avid reader, a ready competitor in racquetball at the Kankakee YMCA during his Roper years. He appreciated and listened daily to classical music and derived pleasure in the performances of the Kankakee Valley Symphony Orchestra with a special interest in the Grace B. Small Piano Competition, which he faithfully attended. In an excerpt from a letter to his sons, he expressed his dedication to "expanding the bounty that a good God provides his people, improving our little corner of the earth...and sharing that pleasure with others". Memorials may be given in memory of the deceased to Hospice of Kankakee Valley, or Wounded Warriors or a charity of the donor's choice.

Memorials may be made to Hospice of Kankakee Valley - www.hkvcares.com, or Wounded Warriors Project - www.woundedwarriorproject.org/Donate

Cemetery Details

All Saints Cemetery

1839 W. Route 102
Bourbonnais, IL 60914
(815) 933-2342

Previous Events

Visitation

JUN 3. 4:00 PM - 8:00 PM (CT)

Bourbonnais - Clancy-Gernon Funeral Homes, Inc.
295 Main St., NW
Bourbonnais, IL 60914
(815) 932-1214
cgfuneral@gmail.com

Funeral Mass

JUN 4. 11:00 AM (CT)

Maternity B.V.M. Catholic Church
308 E. Marsile
Bourbonnais, IL 60914
(815) 933-8285
<http://www.mbvmchurch.org/>

Tribute Wall

SL

“ I am so sorry to hear of Mr. Wilkey's passing. I will always remember his warmth and his kindness. My thoughts and prayers are with all of you.

Sarah Lindert-Kukla - June 11, 2013 at 07:57 PM

GD

“ Marty and the boys. You and your family meant the world to me growing up. I always respected your dad's hard work, common sense, cool demeanor, sensitive nature and understanding on seemingly any situation. Your family is always in my prayers and especially at this time.



Greg Downs - June 05, 2013 at 01:39 PM

RH

“ Ron and I extend our sympathy to Elmira and family. We remember when Gene introduced us to Rockville Twp. The Wilkey's were our closest neighbor for many years. Gene was a kindhearted and soft spoken man.

Ron and Audrey Hill - June 04, 2013 at 08:20 PM

RR

“ I don't personally know Mr. Wilkey but I am acquainted with Elmira through many of her gifted talents she has offered to the community. Reading over Mr. Wilkey's obituary just made me feel as if I were a part of his expanded life experiences. I believe Mr. Wilkey's comment was correct; he certainly changed his little corner of the world with his unassuming nature. I thank him for the gifts he has shared with the world. Peace.

Reisha Raymond - June 03, 2013 at 01:54 PM

PT

“ One of the vivid memories I have of my time coaching at Bishop Mac was during wrestling season and having Gene's presence for Marty's and Barry's matches. He was quietly passionate about wrestling - for both Mac and Manteno - and supported all his boys to the fullest. My sympathies to the Wilkey family. I feel very fortunate to have had our paths cross when they did.

Paul Tutt

Paul Tutt - June 03, 2013 at 01:42 PM

DK

“ Dewey Kilbride lit a candle in memory of Lowell Gene Wilkey



Dewey Kilbride - June 03, 2013 at 01:08 PM

BT

“ Condolances to all the Wilkeys. I know how difficult this time can be as I just lost my father-in-law last month. Marty, hope you and your family can pull together and remember all the great times you had with him. Blake and Laurie Travis

Blake Travis - June 03, 2013 at 08:59 AM

BS

“ We will miss Gene's special friendship. Sending our Love, The Simmons Family, Chuck and Barbara, Bonnie; Amy, Alan & Alaina; Barbara Ann, Lonny & Mikah.



Bonnie Simmons - June 01, 2013 at 08:27 PM

TF

“ *Our family extends our sympathy to the Wilkey Family during this sad time.*



The Don Pallissard Family - June 01, 2013 at 01:34 AM

JC

“ *My thoughts and prayers are with the Wilkey family during this sad time. I recall in my younger days spending many days with my classmate and friend Anthony at the Wilkey farm and at the Smith cabin just down the road from the Wilkey farm. Mr. and Mrs. Wilkey were always very nice to me and my other friends who hung out and played at their farm. God Bless!*

Jeff Cavender - May 31, 2013 at 06:52 PM

KW

“ *you will be missed gene, such a great father you were to your family....*

kyle w - May 30, 2013 at 09:52 AM