



J. Walter Gearhart

May 22, 1936 - November 26, 2021

John Walter Gearhart
1936 - 2021

J. Walter Gearhart's memorable life ended quietly the night of Friday, November 26, 2021. He will be remembered as a gracious, compassionate, and generous man.

Walt was born May 22, 1936 in Tacoma, Washington to John W. Gearhart and Lucy Gearhart (née Wittene). As a child he was known as a prankster and to dabble in magic tricks. Years later he still could palm a coin and then pull it from someone's ear. Walter graduated from Lincoln High School in 1954 and attended the University of Washington with a ROTC scholarship and a major in Sociology. He received a Master's from Pacific Lutheran University. While at the UW he met Marilyn Viebrock, whom he married in 1959.

Walt's working career started early and lasted long. One of Walt's most memorable jobs was watering the elephants when the circus came to Tacoma. Also while growing up in Tacoma he washed dishes at school in exchange for lunches (apparently labor laws worked differently at the time), delivered newspapers, and in high school drove over the mountains to work the summer harvests in eastern Washington. While at the University of Washington he enrolled in the Navy's ROTC program, pumped gas at a full-service station

along Aurora Avenue, and worked as a steward on a private yacht.

After graduating from the UW in 1958, Walt served two years in the Navy as an intelligence officer in Kodiak, Alaska. This was in the midst of the Cold War, and one of Walt's tasks was to distinguish covert Soviet ships from the legitimate U.S. fishing boats plying the waters of Alaska.

After his two years of Naval service, Walt, Marilyn, and newly-born daughter Cami migrated back south to Washington state. Walt worked for the state government first in Kennewick, then in Seattle, and finally in Olympia, where the family moved to in 1968 with toddler Jim now in tow. Over a twenty-six-year career with the state, Walt worked as a parole officer, a corrections officer, and as an administrator of one of the state government's first major computer networks.

While in Olympia, Walt also served as the Chair and administrator of an ethics board for reviewing medical research. After retiring from the state, Walt co-founded Quorum Review, another ethics review service, that ended up employing 200 people.

In 1991 Walt and Marilyn relocated from Olympia to Douglas and instantly became active members of that community. They raised alpacas and golden retrievers on their farm, and sponsored the renovation of the St. Paul's Church where the two had married back in 1959. In addition to running the farm, renovating a church building and co-founding Quorum Review, in "retirement" Walt also found time to direct Chelan County's regional mental health network.

It's probably obvious that Walt was an industrious man, but all work and no play was not his motto. He knew how to have fun and to ensure everyone around him did, too. Walt enjoyed giving ski lessons to his children, his nieces and nephew. He coached youth soccer for years. At an annual family reunion,

he was always counted on to organize a multi-generational softball game, and as permanent pitcher he ensured that even the youngest player connected bat with ball. When he and Marilyn began raising and training golden retrievers, they discovered that dog shows provided an excellent reason to travel the country and was a means to making new, lasting friendships.

Walt was generous with his time and his resources. While in Douglas he founded and chaired the Douglas County Historical Association, supported the Nature Conservancy, sponsored the renovation of the iconic St. Paul's Church in Douglas, led and supported the Wenatchee Kennel Club, and assisted many other charities. Walt and Marilyn were active members of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Olympia, and while in Douglas they joined the congregation of Celebration Lutheran Church in East Wenatchee.

Sadly, in his last years Walt faced the deteriorating effects of Alzheimer's. Still, throughout the disease's progression Walt retained his energy and determination. His caregivers recall the charm and sense of humor that characterized Walt even during his last days.

J. Walter Gearhart passed on Friday, November 26. He is survived by Marilyn, his adored wife of 62 years; his sister Gertrude Waller; his daughter Cami; his son Jim; and six grandchildren: Alex, Max, and Sam Burner; and Michael, Jessica, and Nicole Gearhart.

You can view a Livestream of Walter's Service on the church website: www.clcewen.org and click on "Livestream"

Tribute Wall

JS

“ Living in the Midwest meant that our get-togethers with the Gearharts were typically in 5-year increments. The first extended time with Walt was when the Geraharts lived in Olympia (Ironically the city of my birth). Every time we visited. Walt would cook up the most fantastic breakfasts. Walt and Marilyn's love of dogs was of special significance to our non-dog family. Impressive when he sent three dogs to wake up 3 teenage boys. Walt spent considerable time with us reviewing historical pictures and asking us to identify persons where possible. He assessed our physical worthiness prior to embarking upon a hike in the Stuart Range south of Leavenworth to view the Enchantments from the crest. We had many discussions about his work and business ventures. Walt exemplified what it means to be an empathic, genuinely interested and interesting Christian. Our last time with Walt and Marilyn was in 2018 when he informed us of the on-set of his terminal disease. Marilyn, you were greatly blessed by your husband Walt; Cami and Jim your father was indeed a very special person. May the LORD strengthen you in HIS peace through Christ. We will be with you virtually via the on-line noon Friday heaven bound victory service for Walt.
Jim and Beth Sydow, Chippewa Falls WI

James Sydow - December 15, 2021 at 11:35 AM

MS

“ It was a pleasure and an honor to have met and interacted with Walt. My sincere condolences to Marilyn and her family.

Maggy Susman - December 03, 2021 at 11:16 PM

CJ

“ I first met Walt (& Marilyn) when I joined the Wenatchee Kennel Club more than 20 years ago. Words can't express the respect I have for all Walt (& Marilyn) did for our group. His business expertise led us through a challenging analysis of the club that helped lay the foundation for where we are today...arguably one of the premiere kennel clubs in the country. Walt (and Marilyn's) selfless dedication and humble sharing of time, talents and treasures are beyond compare! I have experience personally and professionally their generosity throughout the years. My life experience is richer because I knew and experienced Walt in many parts of my life. Our lives are better because Walt (& Marilyn) have been part of them.
Notice I say Walt (& Marilyn)...that is on purpose because they exuded the vision of a joint partnership in all they did in life. A model for all of us.
I can't help but think Walt was met with a hearty "Well done good and faithful servant!" when he was welcomed into Heaven.

Chuck St John - December 03, 2021 at 10:17 PM

SR

“ I will always remember his wisdom. He shared with us at a company retreat that all business and even personal interactions should and could be focused on a non-zero outcome. That means, win/win or lose/lose, as long as everybody knows the rules and circumstances a lose/lose is still a non zero outcome. I will always miss him!! He was my very special friend and with Marilyn helped me in ways I will never find the right words for , because he helped me create my family..me and my dogs!!

Sarah Reade - December 02, 2021 at 04:02 AM

LD

“ So sorry to read of Walt's passing. He was a very generous man and always took the time to make you feel at ease. He will be missed and remembered by many.

LaiLee & Paul Daling

LaiLee Daling - November 30, 2021 at 09:26 PM

JG

“ On behalf of Walt's family, thank you for visiting Walt's page. He passed on Friday, November 26. His family had the chance to visit him for Thanksgiving, and were with him during his last hours. We will hold a memorial service at Celebrations Lutheran Church in East Wenatchee, and should have a specific date soon. Please check back. In the meantime, please share a memory or photo of Walt here on the Memory Wall.

Jim Gearhart - November 30, 2021 at 12:40 AM