



Richard Daniel Mueller

May 7, 1928 - May 13, 2016

Richard was born on May 7, 1928 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He was the youngest of three children born to August and Flora Mueller. His two older siblings were Tom Mueller and Betty Jane (Talbot).

As a youth, Richard attended St. Sebastian parochial school in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin. He then attended University of Wisconsin and trained in the U.S.A.F. Cadet Academy from 1953-1955. In 1956, he earned a B.S. degree in special inter-departmental studies. In 1957, he took a solo road journey to Alaska. He arrived in Fairbanks, where he got a job as a land examiner with the BLM. Through BLM's employee benefit program, he purchased a small tract of land and built a cabin.

In 1960, Richard married Jerry Maye Wright. They welcomed their first daughter, Gretchen, into the world in 1961. That same year, Richard earned his commercial single-engine pilot's license and purchased a Piper Cub airplane that would carry him and other travelers on Alaskan fishing and hunting trips.

In 1963, the Alaska Division of Land (ADL) hired Richard, and the Mueller family moved from Fairbanks to Anchorage. Later that year, the Mueller's second daughter, Katrina was born. In 1964, Richard purchased a 40-acre tract of land outside of McKinley National Park and later developed it into a campground, complete with wood-framed tents, outhouses, and campfire pits. He and his family eventually spent many weekends and summers there.

In 1965, after learning that his employer was about to auction off a substantial

amount of land rightfully belonging to Alaskan Natives, Richard informed the media. Ensuing media stories resulted in millions of acres being claimed by and awarded to Native Alaskan tribes. It was one of the largest land settlements in U.S. history at the time. The media firestorm also resulted in Richard losing his job, yet he never regretted acting on behalf of the rightful owners of the land.

In 1970, after living in Wisconsin for a year, Richard and his family returned to Alaska. He became a real estate agent and retired from that occupation in 1985. He and Jerry then moved to Wenatchee, Washington to be closer to their daughter, Gretchen, and their grandson, Marlon.

Richard was a loving father, husband, and grandfather. He was also a relentless adventurer, outdoorsman, and advocate for Native Alaskan land rights. Most recently, he was an author. In 2013, he published "Alaska On My Mind", a reflection of his Alaskan adventures and his role in fostering rightful, significant land claims by Native Alaskans.

Richard died on May 13, 2016, at Wenatchee, WA in Colonial Vista Care Center. Survived by his daughters, Gretchen (Chris) Stark, East Wenatchee, and Katrina Pappas, Marana, AZ; grandson, Marlon Keating, Redmond, and 21 nieces and nephews residing in Wisconsin, Texas, Arizona, and California, survive him.

A Memorial Mass will be, Saturday, June 4, 2016, 10:00am at St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Wenatchee, WA. You are invited to view his online guestbook at www.HeritageMemorialChapel.com . Arrangements are assisted by Heritage Memorial Chapel, East Wenatchee.

Tribute Wall

WS

“ *richard - wow how i miss you. christmas 2016. i still light prayer candles for you on the mountain tops of alaska. peace be with you brother. bill*

William Schmidtkunz - December 05, 2016 at 12:26 AM

GS

“Dad always loved adventure, whether it was taking a detour off a well marked trail, putting his canoe in the rapid filled Nenana river, or landing on fumes of an empty tank in his airplane. Once he landed on thin ice and broke through, the plane went under but he managed to get out without even getting wet. His co-pilot was not as quick, he made it out but was soaking wet. They got on shore and started a fire, daylight was running out on them and they had no overnight gear with them. Luckily a plane spotted them from the air and they were rescued. He was late for dinner that night, really late, but he made it home.

His favorite story to tell was when he and Mom wanted to cross the Chena river in Alaska while it was still frozen. Midway they encountered water running over the ice. Dad was carrying me, just a newborn and on the other side of the river his friend Jim was waiting for them. He called to him and said I am going to toss Gretchen to you. And he did. Thankfully I remember nothing, Jim caught me and everyone made it safely to the shore. Dad would act out this story for us, complete with a pantomime of the toss over the years. I think this illustrated his personality well, always the adventurer getting into tough spots but always coming out unscathed. There were multiple ways Dad could get himself in a bind but he always made it through. He always made it home.

And home was amazing, whether it was a hand hewn one room log cabin on the Chena river, our house in Anchorage, a tiny camp trailer or tent cabin at Windy Pass, or our station wagon with all of our belongings and a husky down the Alcan, any place we were together. As a child I knew no different, I did not know my family was unique. As an adult I am eternally grateful for the adventure, but above all the legacy of love my sister, my son and I have been given by both our parents. There is no greater gift.

gretchen stark - June 13, 2016 at 12:46 PM

WS

“ When I first met Rich in 1981 he was the old, polished sourdough and I was the young, green cheechako. He tolerated me. I tolerated him. We both had our adventures that brought us together. Rich left Alaska with his family in 1984 and I didn't see him for another thirty years. We were instant friends, brothers whose heart beats in the Great Land, under Northern Lights, and all those endless ranges of mountains.

A couple of years ago he flew up by himself and spent ten days with my wife, Charlene, and I. Richard was the good Grandfather we never had to enjoy as children. and now here we were, with a child of our own, and this kind and gentle man sharing our home.

This past January I visited Rich. We attended Mass together, took Communion, held hands during the Our Father. Time for me to leave - tears in both our eyes. Now two old sourdoughs...

May the Northern Lights guide you home Rich.

Bill Schmidtkunz Sutton, Alaska 5/25/16

William Schmidtkunz - May 25, 2016 at 10:24 PM