

Obituary for Earl F. Kennedy, Jr



EARL F. KENNEDY, JR

07/03/1933 - 01/14/2024

Earl Franklin Kennedy, Jr., 90, died in Westerville, OH, on January 14. Earl, son of Earl Sr. and Lucile, was born in Millersburg, Ohio, but grew up in “Old Westerville” with the nickname of Sonny and a reputation for mischief. (Don’t believe us? Find the State Street-facing window in Espresso Air’s historic building and look for the divot in its stone casing. That’s where Dad and his buddies sharpened their pocketknives. He was the last surviving member of that gang of jug-eared, gap-toothed hooligans, and he kept in touch with most of those dear friends their whole lives.) Predeceased by his endlessly patient and endlessly loving big sisters, Barb Stokes (Chuck) and Sarah Slack (Danny), Earl was looking forward to reuniting with his family and once again getting to play

a good card game or two (and swore he would no longer pull their pigtails).

After graduation from Westerville High School, Earl served in the Navy in Hawaii as part of the Korean War efforts. He then met his great love, Betsy, while attending Otterbein after the service. They met on a double date ... with other dates: she, a shy preacher's kid, and he, a tattooed Navy veteran. Earl came home from their first date together and told his mom he was going to marry Betsy. (The historical record does not share what Lucile, who famously referred to Dad as "the one and only," thought of this declaration.) Betsy and Earl married in June, 1958, in Mom's last year of school—just in time, Dad liked to joke, to finally get a Kennedy on the Dean's List at Otterbein.

After graduation, Earl worked various jobs in accounting but learned the valuable lesson early on that a career is nice ... but family is everything. A "girl dad" before that term even existed, Earl proudly raised his three girls—Kim Kennedy, Kandi Murdock (Vince), and Kerri Kennedy (Martin Barron)—with the kind of hands-on involvement that wasn't common for dads of his generation. (Did we sometimes wish Dad, the disciplinarian of the family, paid less close attention? We sure did!) Earl loved raising three strong women—coaching us all on the finer points of playing softball, driving a stick shift, and how to appreciate a really good dirty joke.

When the grandkids came along—Andrew, Adam (Laura), Ian (Katie), Diana (Jimmy), Vincent (Leah), Kennedy, Libby, and M—Earl welcomed

them into the fold: attending games and events, passing along his love of joking and teasing, and playing many, many games of dominoes. (Did they learn, too, that Grandpa was still a disciplinarian, even if he did like to joke? Alas, yes.) When the great-grandkids—Blaise, Elijah, and Kole—arrived, he adored them instantly as well. When Alzheimer’s first started to steal his mind, Dad’s love of his family was the last thing to go. He used pictures to carefully practice family members’ names each morning until he no longer could.

In his lifetime, Earl was an active presence in the community. He ultimately worked at OCLC for many years (where he had a whole different group of “Earl’s Girls” in his department). He also served as Post-Commander of the American Legion, was a longtime red-coat usher at home OSU games, and was frequently involved with his church, both in Westerville (Church of the Messiah) and in Lakeside, Ohio (Lakeside United Methodist), where he and Betsy loved spending their retirement years.

Earl is survived by his beloved Betsy and their girls, grandkids, and great-grandkids, as well as a whole passel of loving nieces and nephews—Vickie Stokes, Shelley Vidmar (Jeff), Marsha North (Bob), Bill Slack (Toni), and Alan Slack (Mary Beth Wolf)—and by his brother- and sister-in-law, Bill and Cathy Messmer. He is also survived by longtime best friends, Tom and Kay Pappas.

A small, private celebration of life will be held for family at a later date. In lieu of flowers, please consider making a person (or two or three) smile or laugh this week. Dad would have loved that.

The family would like to thank Zusman Hospice and the Village at Westerville staff and residents for taking such good care of Dad in his last few months. And Kerri would like to thank her two older sisters for so lovingly taking care of their Pops for so long. They held his hand when she, thanks to distance, could not. She is forever grateful.