



Duaine K. Wenzel

May 12, 1929 - May 19, 2014

Duaine K. Wenzel, Crystal Falls, passed away May 19, 2014 at the Iron County Medical Care Facility.

He was born May 12, 1929 to Edward and Beatrice (Bulman) Wenzel, and grew up in Alma, Michigan, camping, hunting and fishing with his family and playing football, running track and participating in student government at Alma High School, where he graduated with the class of 1947.

Duaine was first in his immediate family to attend college, earning a bachelor's degree in forestry at Michigan Technological University in 1951. There, he was on the Alpine ski team, competing and lettering in slalom, downhill and ski jumping. Some of his studies included surveying timber in remote areas of the U.P., where he was housed in working logging camps. He also spent a summer manning a fire tower in the mountains of Washington state.

He served in the Army from November 1953 to October 1955, stationed in postwar Germany at a center for displaced persons. He was honorably discharged as a specialist third class.

Duaine resumed his studies for a master's degree in wildlife management at the University of Michigan, pursuing projects from writing a thesis on ruffed grouse habitat which has been cited by others to designing and supervising

stream improvement projects while working for the Houghton Lake Experiment Station..

He married the former Phyllis Behnke of Ferndale, Michigan June 15, 1957 and the couple moved to Escanaba, where Duaine spent two weeks a month as an assistant wildlife biologist working with the Escanaba DNR field office and two in Crystal Falls. They moved to Crystal Falls permanently in October, 1957, amid the blazing fall colors of the hardwood forest, and never looked back to their birthplaces in the lower peninsula.

The couple was active with the Crystella ski hill; Phyllis taught adult women to ski and Duaine helped secure the ski jump used there in the 1960s and '70s.. Both drove young jumpers to meets around the U.P.They were also active in other town groups, from the Musicale to the Lions Club.

Both had a special interest in teaching youth, and whether Duaine had an injured eagle he was transporting to a bird rehabilitator or a live-trapped bear being relocated, his first thought was to find young people to show the animals to. As a boy, he'd found his passion raising caterpillars, hatching moth cocoons, investigating birds' nests and fostering orphaned or injured creatures, and that early enthusiasm stuck with him.

As a teen, he had taught himself how to mount birds and animals, and at the DNR, he created a collection of birds ranging from a ruby-throated hummingbird to a snowy owl. The songbirds and raptors were brought in by citizens who'd found them shot or preyed on, and they made fascinating visual aids for his frequent trips to classrooms and camps.

Though by policy DNR assistant biologists at the time had to move to other districts for a promotion, Duaine was fortunate to stay in Crystal Falls as he took on responsibility for wildlife management in District 2, which was then

Dickinson, Iron and Menominee counties. Due to his family responsibilities and ties to the community, he declined to pursue an opportunity in the early '70s to be part of the long-term wolf study on Isle Royale.

During his career he was charged with helping explain the controversial antlerless deer hunt -- an approach that still has its detractors -- and was a key player in reintroducing wild turkeys and Canada geese in his district. He placed the turkeys mainly with cattle farmers who would help get the birds through their first tough winters. "Farmers can't bear to see anything starve," he said.

Duaine also designed the template for grouse walking trails in the state, identifying the types of natural areas that would be most conducive to the birds and additional plantings to attract them.

He hunted deer with a rifle as well as participating in the muzzleloader and archery seasons. He was a resource of recommended sites and advice for a flood of hunters every fall; in many of the years he was at District 2, its three counties accounted for more than half the deer taken in the entire Upper Peninsula.

To further help encourage deer hunting, he became a certified antler scorer for Boone & Crockett and Commemorative Bucks of Michigan. After taking the mount of the largest atypical rack taken in Iron County around the U.P. to show hunters what the county could offer, he was given the rack. It has been recaped and is now on display at the Iron County courthouse per the original hunter's wishes to keep it on public display.

In summer, Duaine fished for rainbow trout, chinook salmon, steelhead and skamania on the Manistique River and Thompson Creek, and is listed with the

#1 eastern rainbow trout in Field & Stream's 1977 flycasting division. He hunted upland game birds and waterfowl in the U.P. and successfully hunted elk and moose outstate. He cherished native and fruit-tree plantings on his property.

In high school, Duaine had helped an Alma businessman to build, frame and finish an addition to a house, and he took an active hand in building his own house on Forest Avenue in the 1970s, swinging a sledgehammer to take out a small ledge in the basement and helping a carpenter frame the house in. He, Phyllis and daughter Holly moved in when the interior studs were still open, there was no plumbing above the basement and the exterior walls hadn't been wallboarded. He continued to finish the house while living in it, designing and installing the heating duct system and finishing all the woodwork himself.

He'd previously built the family's cottage on Lake Michigan, demonstrating his ability to master written instructions and improve on them. "I thought he knew how to do all these things," wife Phyllis recalls, "until I saw him sit down on a bag of concrete mix and open a brochure that said 'How to Mix Concrete.'" (The cottage's footings are still stable, after 50 years.)

Duaine had to take early retirement from the DNR in 1983, due to his failing kidneys. It was a difficult but unavoidable decision. A friend had always told people "Believe it or not, I know a guy who loves to get up and go to work every morning of his life."

But, with a kidney transplant in 1987, he was able to continue with his outdoor interests – including turkey hunting – and devote time to his church.

Duaine's far-reaching talents included playing the violin; he picked it up again in his 70s, after at least 60 years without playing, in order to play at church with Phyllis at the piano. He was also an accomplished caricaturist, and many

of his creations were hits at DNR retirement celebrations.

He approached people with a genuine interest and a positive outlook. “He didn't have an enemy in the world,” one friend remarked. As his macular degeneration progressed and he needed home help and drivers, he made new friends with those contacts.

Duaine had myriad health challenges: open-heart surgery, arterial opening, serious blood infections and the negative effects of decades of immunosuppressants, to name a few. But he continued to find ways to do what he wanted, from turkey hunting to projects around the house, no matter how many barriers stood in his way.

His storytelling was legendary, though no detail was exaggerated. In his mind, the ruffles on a trout stream or the points on a buck's rack were as clear and unchanging in their current telling as when he saw them 60 years before. To hear him tell the story of a bear trying to bluff him or a turkey so wily it got away was to practically be in the woods alongside him. To hear him tell the story of a bear trying to bluff him or a turkey so wily it got away was to practically be in the woods alongside him.

In the last months of his life, Duaine was in the rehab unit at the Iron County Medical Care Facility, and was able to see Phyllis, a resident there, daily. His zeal for mentoring others in hunting and fishing, which began in Crystal Falls in 1957 with one of his first friends, extended through coaching a facility staffer in turkey hunting and lending him calls and audiotapes.

Through almost-weekly setbacks, Duaine pursued his physical therapy and defied his failing health with the determination and optimism that marked all aspects of his life. The week of his funeral, the facility's video screens were showing an apt quote from the late boxer Jack Dempsey: “A champion is a

guy who gets up even when he can't.”

Duaine cherished a Christian faith he'd had since he was a young man, a faith that is shared by his family and is sustaining them. He is survived by wife Phyllis, daughter Holly (Randal) Swanson; brother Gail (Gala) Wenzel and their children Gary (Tracie) and Gayl (Rafer) Yocom and families as well as nephew Gary (Linda) Kilduff and great-niece Alison.

Interment services were held at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery May 21, with the Rev. Michael Rucinski officiating.

In lieu of flowers, a memorial fund has been established: the Duaine Wenzel Family Memorial, c/o First National Bank, 125 Superior Ave., Crystal Falls, Michigan 49920.

The visitation is set for Monday, July 28, 2014 from 11:00 am to 12 noon at the Nash Funeral Home, 104 N. Third Street, Crystal Falls. The Memorial Service will follow at 12 noon at the funeral home. Rev. Michael Rucinski will officiate. A continued time of lunch and fellowship will follow the service at the Faith Fellowship Bible Church at 1314 S. US Hwy. 2, Crystal Falls, MI 49920.

The family has entrusted the Nash Funeral Home and Cremation Services of Crystal Falls with the funeral arrangements.

Previous Events

Visitation

JUL 28. 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM (CT)

Nash Funeral Home and Cremation Services, Inc.
104 N. Third Street
P.O.Box 147
Crystal Falls, MI 49920
1-906-875-6381
nashfuneralhome@gmail.com
<https://www.nashfuneralhome.net/>

Memorial Service

JUL 28. 12:00 PM (CT)

Nash Funeral Home and Cremation Services, Inc.
104 N. Third Street
P.O.Box 147
Crystal Falls, MI 49920
1-906-875-6381
nashfuneralhome@gmail.com
<https://www.nashfuneralhome.net/>

Tribute Wall



“ 1 file added to the album *Memories Album*



Nash Funeral Home and Cremation Services, Inc. - May 30, 2014 at 01:37 PM

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“ Dear *Phyllis and Holly,*

May you find peace and keep the memories of Duaine close to your heart. I have enjoyed getting to know all of you. God's peace, Cindy Lichtenberger

Cindy Lichtenberger - May 29, 2014 at 07:45 PM