



Gerald "Jerry" Orazem

May 27, 1927 - March 26, 2023

Gerald ("Jerry") J. Orazem of Gastonia, North Carolina and Travelers Rest, South Carolina passed away peacefully at home on March 26, 2023 surrounded by loving family, friends and caregivers.

Born on May 27, 1927, Jerry was the son of the late John Orazem and Viola Croteau. He was born and raised in the tiny northern Minnesota mining towns of Biwabik and Keewatin with his two brothers, Eddie and Johnny, and his sister, Betty. Starting at age 16, Jerry's father worked his entire life on the Mesabi Iron Ore Range. As the first-generation born of immigrant parents, Jerry's parents (John and Viola) worked hard to give their children a better life than they could have in the old country.

The Great Depression hit the Iron Range hard. At times, there was no work for the miners. It was hard times for the families in these tiny mining towns. Even through the toughest times, Jerry often reflected that he never felt poor. The entire Orazem family (including his Mother) were avid hunters. Venison and Walleye, and the occasional duck, became a significant food source throughout many of the leaner years. While his family lived a simple life, in so many ways it was idyllic, and he frequently reflected that "he had a rich childhood."

Despite his bucolic childhood, Jerry had a propensity to get into mischief. As a youngster, he would run down back alleys with his friends tipping over garbage cans. Jerry and his childhood best friend, David Golden, were known to "borrow" crab apples from the neighbor's trees, and on Halloween, they

would “wax” their neighbor’s windows. He also regretted experimenting with smoking so-called “Indian Tobacco.”

Jerry was in 8th grade when the United States entered WWII and he watched each of his siblings leave to serve our Country. A few months before he turned 18, he joined the Navy. He joined the Navy’s V-5 aviation program but was grounded when they discovered that he had poor eyesight. He was also granted an appointment to West Point but declined the opportunity due to his limited eyesight. After the war was over, Jerry attended the University of Minnesota on the GI Bill where he earned a Bachelor of Science and Master’s degree in Chemical Engineering.

While at the University of Minnesota, Jerry often went to the Newman Club to attend mass and to socialize with other Catholic singles. At one of the gatherings, Jerry met Jane Lamm. They started dating in 1950 and he proposed to her. Jane and her parents shared with Jerry that she had some indications of early stages of lymphoma. Despite this revelation, in 1951 Jerry married Jane. In 1952, daughter Anne Louise was born. Following Anne’s birth, Jane became severely ill and passed away at the age of 22, leaving Jerry as a single parent of a one-year-old.

Subsequently, Jerry attended a Catholic picnic for singles by a lake in Minneapolis and was blessed to meet Patricia Nagel from Mound, Minnesota. Dad asked Patricia to dance, and the rest was history. Jerry and Pat were married in February, 1954. One of their favorite memories was when Pat walked down the aisle at their wedding and two-year-old Anne cried out “There’s Mommy!”

Later on, Jerry and Pat welcomed the birth of daughter, Mary, followed in quick succession by brothers, Jerry and Johnny. Then, quite a bit later, they welcomed their last child, Betty.

In 1952, Jerry joined a small company that made lithium metal and chemicals in a suburb of Minneapolis. Later that year the company was approached by the United States Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) to produce lithium in significant quantities. This project was top secret and an A-One government

priority. With large deposits of lithium in Gaston County, NC, Jerry was tapped to be part of a start-up team to design and develop a lithium mining and manufacturing facility nearby.

In 1959, Jerry and Pat moved to Gastonia where Jerry was an executive at Lithium Corporation of America (LCA) for over 30 years. During this time, he spearheaded several joint ventures involving facilities in the UK, Japan and Chile. He received a special award from the AEC for the construction and start-up of the Gaston County mine and plant and was credited with a number of important patented inventions. Jerry's best and lifelong friends worked with him at LCA, including Joe Nelli, Howard Schwartz, Masao Kobayashi, to name just a few. We remember the friendly banter with his friends over the years – Mr. Kobayashi: Jerry, you talk too fast. Jerry: Masao, you listen too slow.

Jerry's career at LCA defined him. What he was most proud of was the people – the young engineers that he gave opportunities to, the good jobs he created and the mothers and fathers who were able to build successful careers. Those careers often enabled them to provide for their children beyond what their parents had been able to do for them while working in the textile mills of North Carolina.

The Orazem family was a staple in Wesley Park, a largely Catholic neighborhood near St. Michael's Catholic Church and School in Gastonia. The early years in Gastonia included wonderful family time at the Lazy Day Ranch, where the kids rode horses with neighbors, set off rockets and got into lots and lots of mischief. Large Wesley Park families such as the Williams, McCloskeys, Whitesides, Gallaghers and Cherrys provided for endless neighborhood games and fun and, of course, a bit more mischief. We remember fondly the long summer evenings playing "kick the can" and "fox and hounds" with countless neighborhood kids.

With Jerry's many world travels and semi-secretive business adventures, the Orazem family was deemed to be a bit exotic for Gastonia. Jerry spoke so fast that many of our childhood friends thought that he was speaking Russian.

This persisted for years and even to the present day. One of our neighbors recently shared this “rumor” with Jerry and other family members at a memorial service for Bill and Betty Williams, dear neighbors in Wesley Park for nearly 50 years.

All of Jerry’s children attended St. Michael’s Catholic School. Family memories include many priests and nuns. We remember singing along with Sister Carolyn Mary who remains a cherished family friend and Father Gregory’s favorite motto: “Do not do what you want to do, but what you OUGHT to do.” As Jerry often said, the children attended the OUGHT school. Jerry retired in 1991 to spend more time with his beloved “Queen” Patricia. They promptly purchased a cabin cruiser and christened it the “Patricia Ann.” Jerry and Pat enjoyed their next 25 years together boating, traveling around the world, working on the Orazem and Nagel genealogy, spending time with their large family at the Wolf Laurel resort, and working on house projects for and with their children. In 2016 at the age of 90, Pat joined many of their friends and family in heaven. After her death, Jerry focused on finishing the Orazem/Nagel family history – which he did – and catching up with his friends from LCA. In early 2022 Jerry moved to Travelers Rest, South Carolina to live in a renovated home designed just for him, at a farm owned by one of his children.

Jerry was exceptionally proud of his children. He was quick to share and celebrate their extraordinary work ethic and many accomplishments...to anyone who would listen.

Jerry’s love for Pat is legendary. They had plenty of challenging years, but they overcame them together and loved each other deeply. Their love for each other grew stronger every year of their 62 years of marriage. As a strong and devoted Christian, Jerry was guided in his faith that he would join Pat along with other family members and friends with Jesus in heaven. We are celebrating their love made whole again, together in heaven.

Jerry’s life is a near-perfect example of servant love. Everything he did, he genuinely tried to do for others – for the people he loved and for those who

depended on him. Jerry was famously positive and optimistic. He lived life with a twinkle in his eye and a keen sense of humor and joy. Regardless of the situation, his glass was always half full – seeing the good, the sweet humor and the beauty in life...even when others saw darkness and despair. He lived his life with no regrets and shared this perspective frequently with his family. Jerry is preceded in death by his first wife, Jane Lamm Orazem, and his second wife, Patricia Nagel Orazem; his brothers, Edmund Orazem (Merri) and John Orazem (Marlis); his sister, Betty (George) and his adored granddaughter Willa Rusowicz-Orazem. He is survived by his five children, Anne Orazem Kahn (Robert) of Charleston, SC; Mary Jane Orazem (Tom) of Mars Hill, NC; Gerald James Orazem (Cathy) of Rocky Point, NC; John Patrick Orazem (Claire) of Orange, CT; and Betty Orazem Temple (Robert) of Travelers Rest, SC. He is also survived by grandchildren: Brian Kelso, Jane Beckham, Noah Kahn, Adam Kahn, Sarah Basile, Jacob Kahn, Christine Foshee Isaacson, James Foshee, Jenell Tramell, Thiec Rahlan, Yung Nay, Ngon Nay, Christopher Orazem, Luke Rusowicz–Orazem, Sophie Temple, Sarah Beth Temple and Hudson Temple, and twenty-eight great-grandchildren. He is also survived by longtime, close family friend, Rosie Casper Hinkle, as well as many other loving friends, caregivers and extended family.

The family plans to hold a funeral and a private graveside service in Gastonia, NC at a date and time to be determined.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Catherine's House, Belmont, North Carolina (catherineshouseinc.org).

Cemetery Details

Private

Tribute Wall

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“ Jerry was a mentor and friend. He was one of the founders of Lithium Corp.in Gastonia, NC. Without his ingenuity and perseverance, there would likely be no lithium available on such a large scale for EV's, as well as a myriad of other applications. He was a courageous entrepreneur who left is home in Minnesota to venture into the lithium rich Piedmont of North Carolina with no guarantee of success. He was a great man who will not be forgotten.

Robert Letchford - March 29, 2023 at 10:35 AM