

CROSSED THE BAR

Donald Burton Denison
January 27, 1930 – September 1, 2021



Donald Burton Denison, age 91, passed away on September 1, 2021 at Hospice of Dayton. Born on January 27, 1930 to Walter Raymond and Mae (Netter) Denison in Dearborn, Michigan.

Denison, the youngest of three boys was raised in Dearborn, Michigan. Don and his brothers, Raymond Walter and Harold Edward, were children of the Great Depression and encountered many challenges growing up. Don suffered severe burns on his leg as a young boy and was treated with one of the early successful skin graft procedures. At age 10, his mother Mae died. During his Dearborn High School years, his brother Ray and wife Shirley asked him to move to New York City. They kept a steady eye on young Don while he acquired enough credits (and experience!) in the city to return to graduate with his friends from Dearborn High.

Don then attended Michigan State Normal College (Eastern Michigan University) 1949-1953, where he was president of his senior class and a member of the Kappa Phi Alpha fraternity, graduating with a BS degree. College tuition was earned by his summer employment sailing the freighters of the Great Lakes and serving cruise passengers on the Caribbean. While at EMU, he met Mary O'Connor of Birmingham, Michigan. They were married in 1954 and together, raised four children.

After college, Don taught sixth grade while working additional jobs to support his family. He then joined Michigan Bell to specialize in the growing mainframe data processing and information technology field. In 1962, Don accepted a position with IBM and moved the family south to Alabama, where he worked at the Marshall Space Flight Center and the NASA Saturn V, supporting the Apollo moon project in Huntsville. Three years later they all moved on to Atlanta, Georgia, continuing with the IBM sales team along with other data processing firms. By 1972, the family returned to Michigan where he implemented the retail point of sale system for the J.L. Hudson Co.

Don continued his career in the developing field of computer technology by joining his brothers-in-law at Markline Oil Co in Troy, MI. Together they transformed the fuel stations to a self-service format. Continuing to stoke his entrepreneurial fire, he invested his skills with an upscale vegetable and specialty food market, retail micro/personal computers and data processing consulting. Finishing up his very productive career, Don joined Sperry (later Unisys) where his industry sales experience and knowledge of large mainframe systems kept Kellogg's Corn Flakes in your cupboard and your lights on as he served his municipal power distribution clients. Lastly, he worked for his favorite charities, the American Red Cross and the Grass River Natural Area.

The mid '80s brought about change through a divorce and later his retirement, but Don also was able to fulfill his dream by acquiring property on Torch Lake in Northern Michigan. His lake house was completed by the end of the decade and it became the site of countless family gatherings and reunions. DB, as he was later referred to by some of us, loved the activities at the lake; swimming, boating, sailing, whiffle ball and "roofball," as well as the many meals prepared by his family and occasionally enjoying a certain fried poultry dish from a nearby gas station.

During this time in Northern Michigan he met and married Anne (Wiley) Leakas in 2000. Together they enjoyed their combined families and residences, including Anne's house Bluebell in the Belvedere Club in Charlevoix. They enjoyed many friendships during their time in Dayton, Oakwood, and Kettering as well as Hilton Head and the Belfair Plantation in South Carolina. Golf was one of their regular activities, with memberships at Belvedere and Belfair. Don and Ann enjoyed traveling together throughout the U.S. and in Europe. Don also enjoyed his many convertibles used for summertime cruises.

Throughout his life, Don valued his loyal friendships with the Dearborn contingent, fraternity brothers, poker club members, golfing buddies and co-workers from all of his varied occupations. His memory and recall was at the top of the scale with vivid tales well told and descriptions crystal clear. We all will dearly miss Don's humor, wit, intellect and stories in the days and years to come. Rest easy, dear man, your job on this Earth is now complete.

He is survived by his wife Anne and his children Elizabeth Martin (Jeff), David (Nancy), Cass (Patricia), and James (Michelle); grandchildren Sam (Joy), Connor (Julia) and Lucy Martin, Kira, Drew, Joe, John, Claire, Jack and Charlie Denison. He was delighted by his great-grandchildren Penelope, Augie, Jack, and Isla, Luke and Max. Don also enjoyed his wonderful stepchildren Chip, Andy, Lori and Scott Leakas and their children, Samantha, Margeaux, Cody, Madison and son Crew, Wyatt, Gunnar and Theo as well as many nieces and nephews, his half-brother George Denison and his beloved sister-in-law Shirley (Travers) Denison.

Don was preceded in death by his parents and both older brothers, Harold's wife Viola (Tagaduan) and half sister Beverly Burke.

Special thanks go out to Margeaux and Andy Leakas for their kindness and gentle care of Don.

A memorial service for Don will be held on Thursday, September 9, 2021, 4:00 pm at Routsong Funeral Home, 2100 E Stroop Rd, Kettering, Ohio. The event will also be live-streamed on the Routsong Funeral Home YouTube channel. For those who wish to honor Don with a donation, please consider the Grass River Natural Area, PO Box 231, Bellaire, MI, 49615 or Hospice of Dayton, 324 Wilmington Ave, Dayton, OH, 45420
A Celebration of Life is also planned for the summer of 2022 in the Northern Michigan region.