



Walter Bemak

July 7, 2014

Walter Bemak was born in New York City on November 10, 1925. He grew up in Great Neck, Long Island. He joined the army at age 18 fought in the Battle of the Bulge. He was given an honorable discharge after suffering from shrapnel wounds and frozen feet, and was awarded the Purple Heart for his service. At age 20 he met the love of his life, Ruth (Rusty) Ruskin. After they married, they moved to Chicago so he could continue with his BA and MA degrees at the University of Chicago. Upon the completion of his degrees, he moved to Levittown, NY, with his wife and two children, and one on the way. He taught English at both high school and college levels. He eventually became the head of the English department at Herricks, Cold Spring Harbor, and Syosset High schools. In 1967 he became handicapped after a botched back surgery. He was told he would never walk again, but Walter, demonstrating his lifelong tenacity, was determined that he would walk again. He was wheelchair bound, and had already left teaching to work in publishing in Manhattan as Executive English Editor with MacMillan and then Holt, Rinehart & Winston. He commuted initially on the train, and after becoming handicapped, in his car which had been altered so that he could drive with hand controls rather than his paralyzed legs. Living on Eaton's Neck, he enjoyed his ride down the long strip of Asharoken with Long Island Sound on one side and the Bay on the other. He often said that the long commute was worth it to see the beautiful natural scenery as he approached his home and family. Being an intrepid person, within a year of the surgery he was up on his feet and walking. Living on the water, he decided to get a boat. The first boat was a little Boston Whaler, which he used with his family to tootle around in the Sound. But it turned into a lifelong passion for sailing. The first sailing vessel was a dinghy; five boats later the dinghy evolved into a 32 foot sloop. All of the boats were named "Walrus," an apt name that was a combination of Walter and Rusty. Many summers were spent with Ruth and Walter sailing with their yacht club up and down Long Island Sound, and sometimes as far north as Newport, RI. Nantucket, and Martha's Vineyard. After retirement, they sold their house and most of their possessions, including the Walrus. They bummed around Europe for a year, and came home when they started missing their family. Walter and Rusty's passion for classical music brought them to the Berkshires in 1998. They first lived in Pittsfield, and then moved to Kimball Farms, Walter's final home. There they spent the summers

enjoying Tanglewood as volunteers and supporters, as well as the other cultural offerings of the area. Walter had a special passion for the music of Gustav Mahler, and listened to it during his last days. He leaves his wife, Ruth (Rusty), three children, Fred Bemak and his wife Rita Chung of Fairfax Station, VA; Joy Hanes and her husband Lee Hanes of Old Lyme, CT, and Nancy Bemak of Bennington, VT. Three granddaughters, who were the lights of his life; Amber Bemak of Amherst, MA; Lani Bemak of New Orleans, LA; and Biza Bemak of Burlington, VT. But wait, there's more! One wonderful great-grandson, Tennessee James Tourville, and another great-grandchild on the way. Walter was much loved by all who knew him. He always had a joke or pun on the tip of his tongue, and his closest friends were honored to be the recipients of his celebratory poems. He nicknamed himself "The Poet Nauseate of Berkshire County" and that is probably how he would like to be remembered. Per Walter's wishes, price of admission to his memorial service is a rhymed couplet. On the last night of his life, he was surrounded by his family expressing their love and singing, and reading Bleak House by Dickens, his favorite novel. His last two years were spent with a wonderful team from Hospice Care in the Berkshires. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Hospice Care of the Berkshires.

Comments



“ We've missed Walter and Ruth at our Walden Village dinners since they moved to Kimball Farms.

Ruth, I'm so sorry for your loss.

Sincerely, Dorcas Abell

Dorcas Abell - December 03, 2015 at 02:38 PM



“ Ruth, I am so sorry to hear about Walter. He will be greatly missed. He was loved by all who knew him. It was an honor to know him while I worked At Kimball. May God bless you and your family in this very difficult time. I know he loved looking at the train layout when my husband and I set it up and we enjoyed seeing him there.

Marilynn Gallup - December 03, 2015 at 02:38 PM



“ Dear Ruth,
I am so sorry to hear about Walter. I know how close you both were. Please know I will keep both of you in my prayers for strength during this difficult time.
My deepest sympathy
Fran Feldsine

frances feldsine - December 03, 2015 at 02:38 PM



“ Ruth,

I'm so sorry for your loss. My thoughts and prayers are with you and your family.

Bonnie Kelly

July 16, 2014 at 12:00 AM