



John Leo Kurasiewicz

December 25, 1943 - March 1, 2021

The Life Of John Leo Kurasiewicz

John Leo Kurasiewicz was born on Christmas Day 1943 to Michael John Kurasiewicz of Hatfield, MA and Charlotte "Lottie" Boniowski Kurasiewicz Maziarz of North Tonawanda. John's birthplace was Denver, CO and he was always drawn back to the Rocky Mountains and to his natal city. His parents operated a Phillips 66 Gas station from the early 1940's until his father passed at a young age in 1952. His mother then decided that she and her son should return to North Tonawanda where her family still resided.

At the age of nine John had to leave Colorado and it was a difficult transition for him to make. During those years in Denver his parents had bonded with the neighbors next door, the Menzie family. Their daughter Billie was born just a few days after John was born and they became close childhood friends. As the years passed, Billie and John remained close and they called each other "sister" and "brother". Throughout his life John made frequent trips to visit Billie and never lost his wanderlust for the mountains and valleys of Colorado. Although John lost his father at an early age, his father had taught him lifelong lessons about survival and instilled in him a love for adventure in the great outdoors. His father brought him a Chesapeake dog which they named Bill and John learned to care for and respect animals. John learned safety with rifles from his father and water survival. He also learned about loss and grief and missed his father his entire life.

From his parents John received a model train of the Santa Fe line and for the

rest of his life he loved riding on steam trains all across the United States. His favorite was the Cumbres-Toltec from New Mexico to Colorado. He also had a passion for photography and left a pictorial journal of travels on Route 66 which he followed many times, especially in retirement.

John went to city schools in North Tonawanda and made lasting friendships with the kids in his neighborhood. He could be seen with the Kloch brothers and sisters and became a part of their family. John had no siblings and easily fitted into his "adopted" family. He had a clique of friends which lasted his entire life. John could always be seen with one of the Klochs, especially Tony, and his buddies Tom Stec, Earl Boniowski and Ted Nemiec.

He graduated from North Tonawanda High School in the Class of 1963.

During those years he was a member of the Swim Team, earning his letter sweater early on and keeping it all his life. He was not a particularly studious teenager, but enjoyed learning by experience and self-study. His interests were in the sciences and history and he earnestly read National Geographic and anything about the history of the West.

Deciding not to pursue college, John enlisted in the United States Air Force and began his adventures abroad. During the four years he served his country, John's duties took him to faraway places where he found the adventures of his dreams. His assignments were dangerous and often secretive. John was in Palomares, Spain on a hazardous cleanup operation, which later made national news. He found time for diversions, though, and took many photos of the bikini-clad girls on the beach.

On his assignment in Thule, Greenland he survived a world record- shattering blizzard with winds over 230 mph and took pictures of that! He also made a friend of an Arctic Fox pup and called him Archie. Suntanning on an iceberg was a far cry from the beaches of Spain. This duty tour was another dangerous mission and was a threat to his health, which he did not recognize until later in life.

He had one more hazardous mission on the Johnston Atoll where young guys cleaned up waste from the government testing of nuclear weapons. John had

stories to tell of all these adventures and often talked about the guys who worked together and watched each others' backs.

After his four year tour and some contract work, John returned to the states and spent a short time as a firefighter in California. Then he decided to settle down in North Tonawanda. He took a job with GM, Delphi and worked at plants in Buffalo and Lockport in plastics and also as an assembler. He was often not happy with this work, but it brought him security and financial stability until his retirement.

John was a man of and with many HATS! He was a skilled woodworker making furniture and home decor for his family and his home. He was a sharpshooter and could be found on the firing range with friends. He was attuned to a healthy lifestyle and maintained his physical strength at the gym and in the pool. After retirement he was interested in eating healthy and would juice fruits and veggies everyday. John was not much of a cook, but he sure enjoyed those Polish and Italian dinners with family and friends and especially Christmas morning birthday breakfasts with the Kloch family!

He traveled often and as far as he could roam, sometimes with friends and sometimes alone. He was always searching for a buddy for the long ride across country on backroads and Route 66. His friend was his truck and he kept each for many years as he did his people friends. On these travels with John, he always purchased a hat and was seldom seen without one on his head. He cherished a hat that belonged to his father from the Phillips 66 gas station and proudly showed it to friends.

John was married twice, but had no children of his own. All children loved John for his natural ease and kindness. He was a kid who never quite grew up, loving adventure of all kinds and people of all ages. John's children were those of others along with the animals that found their way into his heart and his home. He spoke of his animal friends as one does of children, giving them many pet names. His orange marmalade cat was Jason, but he called him by many names including Tub o' Lard and Freckle Lips. His foundling dog Thule

was an Alaskan Husky who also had a wanderlust. He could jump any fence and John reluctantly has to chain him at times or chase him down with his truck. There was also a grey tiger cat named Lopear who happened to move right in after his elderly owner passed away. He just crossed the street and sat himself down on John's stoop.

John had difficult health issues, some of which can be attributed to genetics and some to his early hazardous occupation. He was always actively searching for answers to his problems. As his breathing problems became more pronounced, he sought advice from many doctors and others who were also going through similar health problems. John never gave up and always believed that he would have more adventures. He quietly accepted the reality of his problems and passed quietly into the next dimension on March 1, 2021. John's last wish was to be forever in his beloved mountains of Colorado.

Some bright, sunny day later this year he will be taken to those Rocky Mountains along with his trusted pals Thule and Jason. They will float freely in the Colorado winds and have plenty of fresh air. His friend Billie will fulfil this wish and John will return to the place where he was born.

Johnnie will be remembered by many friends and family and his stories will be shared for many years to come. He is survived by his dear cousins Lois Toman and Donna Winters along with numerous cousins on both his parents' sides. John had many friends who were more than just acquaintances. He loved every one of his friends and family members. He will not be forgotten by his close friends Bohdan and Zenon Kowal, Frankie Cornell, his breakfast buddies Don and Patti, his first wife Cheryl Laskowski or his second wife Elaine McCarthy who wrote this tribute to her friend John. May you rest peacefully with your father and mother, your ancestors, all your friends and your furry pals!