



Dr. Gary David Wray

October 1, 1943 - February 3, 2022

Dr. Gary David Wray, age 78 of Lewes, passed away peacefully late at night on February 3, 2022, surrounded by so much love, after a very short and very courageous battle with cancer. Gary was diagnosed with terminal cancer two weeks before Christmas and his family would like to thank the team of Beebe Healthcare nurses and physicians who provided him with such thorough and compassionate care. Gary always felt very fortunate to be surrounded by and have access to such a great medical community, having previously been a Stage 3 cancer survivor in 2014. Even on his deathbed in Beebe ICU, Gary was able to communicate to his family how “everyone has been so great” during his treatment, and he respected his nurses and doctors so much. Thank you, Beebe Healthcare, from the Wray family for allowing us to feel that we did everything possible for Gary, and that we provided him with peace and comfort in his final moments in this life. Gary was a proud West Virginian born on October 1, 1943, at Raleigh General Hospital in Beckley, WV, to the late Roy Oliver Wray, Jr., and Louella Harper Wray. He graduated from Charleston High School in Charleston, WV, in 1961. Gary was a 1965 graduate of Morris Harvey College (now University of Charleston) in Charleston, WV, where he majored in his lifelong passion – history – with a minor in another lifelong passion, education. His entire life Gary would be a thorough source of historical facts – he was an amazing storyteller. Gary was a member of Tau Kappa Epsilon fraternity while attending Morris Harvey, where he made some lifelong fraternity brothers, in addition to his lifelong friends from Charleston High School. Gary’s love of his home state of West Virginia ran through his blood for the rest of his life and he passed this love onto his family. Gary moved to DE in 1966, and he earned his master’s degree in history and administration certificate from University of Delaware in 1969 and his doctorate in educational leadership from University of Delaware in 1991.

Before acknowledging his life accomplishments, which are many because of a life well-lived, you must know that first and foremost Gary David Wray was a family man. His family was his first love. He loved everyone in his family so much. He was always our family patriarch. Gary was lovingly raised by so many deeply loved and missed family members in West Virginia that predeceased him, particularly his parents, Roy and Louella Wray; his maternal grandparents TJ “Jeff” (Granddaddy) and Mabel (Granny) Harper, and his

paternal grandmother Eula (Mother) Wray; and his uncle and aunt, Ted and Margaret Ann George. Gary is also predeceased by his brother, Randall Wray; his sister, Julia Ann Wray; his uncle, Thomas Harper; his cousin, Ronnie Hall; and many other close family members, almost all of whom are buried together in family plots on Harper Road in Beckley, WV, and whose legacy we all carry within our hearts. Gary's Granddaddy, TJ "Jeff" Harper of Harper, WV, with whom he frequently lived with as he was growing up, was quite the businessman and community leader – he would take young Gary around to his business ventures, including coal mines. Gary's father, Roy O. Wray, Jr., was a newspaper advertising sales executive in Charleston, WV, for over 40 years, and Gary spent many hours in the Charleston Newspapers building growing up, at his father's desk and down in the print room. Gary's first job was as a paperboy in Charleston. Gary lived the rest of his life making his Granddaddy (who passed away in 1959 when Gary was 15), his father, and all his family, proud. One of Gary's final resting places will be buried with his family in Beckley, WV.

Gary lovingly raised three daughters and nine grandchildren with Nancy Alden Roberts, his ex-wife and lifelong friend and companion since they met in college when they were 17 years old, and who passed away just weeks before Gary on Christmas Day, 2021. Their three daughters, Jessica (Mrs. John) O'Leary in Ocean View, Robin Harper Wray in Lewes, and Katharine "Katie" Alden (Mrs. Mike) Schimmel in Lincoln, will forever miss their mother and father, who they know are now watching over them together in Heaven. Gary was a loving and doting Pa Pa to nine grandchildren, ranging in age from 7 to 21, who miss Pa Pa's constant presence in their lives: Mandy Christopher of Berlin, MD; Abbey Christopher of Salisbury, MD; Max and Zak Wray of Lewes; Liam, Sean, and Lily O'Leary of Ocean View; and Nicholas and Christian Schimmel of Lincoln. In addition to his three daughters, two sons-in-law, and nine grandchildren, Gary is also survived by his cousin Ted George and his wife Sue in Dover, and their children Ryan and Ashley; his cousin Steve George and his wife Robin in Beckley, WV; cousin Pam George; brothers- and sisters-in-law John Alden (Amy) in Columbus, OH, and Jim Alden (Kathy) in Spring Lake, NJ; eight nieces and nephews from his Alden family that he was always "Uncle Gary" to; his longtime special friend and companion since 1987, Janet Graviet, and her children Nicole Keller, Chrissy Meszaros, and Matt Graviet; many lifelong friends, particularly Betty and Butch Daugherty and Carolyn and Chuck Wilson in MD; and many other friends, acquaintances, and colleagues Gary truly cared about and enjoyed and who will all deeply miss him.

Gary came to DE in 1966 from WV and continued his career in education in DE as a teacher and administrator in the Caesar Rodney, Milford, and Cape Henlopen districts. During his 30+ years in the Cape Henlopen School District, Gary was a teacher at Cape Henlopen High School in the 1970s, principal at Lewes Junior High School and Lewes Middle School in the 1980s and 1990s, and director of secondary education from 1984-

1993, retiring as a Cape Henlopen School District administrator in 1995. He was elected to the Cape Henlopen School Board in 2005 and served from 2005-2010; he was vice president of the Board for one year and president for three years. During his tenure he actively worked to build the new Cape Henlopen High School that opened in 2010, and Gary helped to create the Cape Henlopen Educational Foundation (CHEF). Gary also was familiar with the charter school system, as he worked to create the charter for Sussex Academy and served on the board of directors as a founding member until he resigned from his Sussex Academy board seat in 2001. Two of his six grandsons will be graduating from Sussex Academy. Gary proudly proclaimed himself principal of "Wray Academy" during the pandemic as he helped with remote learning for two of his six grandsons from March 2020 to June 2021. Gary also was a university professor of history and many other subjects, both in undergraduate and graduate programs, in many colleges and universities throughout DE and MD, primarily at Wilmington University for many decades.

From the moment Gary moved to DE in 1966, his passion for history was involved in all aspects of his life in DE, first working on improving Fort Delaware and later in the 1990s shifting his attention to Fort Miles in Lewes. In August 2003, Gary co-founded the Fort Miles Historical Association (FMHA) with Bob Frederick, David Main, and the late Delaware State Park Historian Lee Jennings, while standing under Tower 3 located at Dewey Beach. Later, in 2005, Gary and Lee wrote the book on Fort Miles, published by Arcadia Publishing. During his 17-year tenure with FMHA, Gary served as the organization's president, combining his love of history, particularly military history, with his extraordinary vision and dedication to preserving history and serving his community, to lead FMHA to significant growth and the formation of the Fort Miles Museum in 2016. Gary's goal was to work with others to make the Fort Miles Museum the best WWII museum inside a WWII facility in the country. Gary took on a mission to preserve the railroad history of Lewes as one of the founders of the Lewes Junction Railroad & Bridge Association (LJRBA). Civic duty and saving historical artifacts were lifelong passions for Gary Wray, and the members of FMHA and LJRBA are continuing those efforts.

Gary was elected to the oldest DE historical society, the Delaware Historical Society Board of Trustees, and served two terms. In 2016, Gary was chosen for the Delaware Maritime Hall of Fame when the Overfalls Foundation held its 10th annual Delaware Maritime Hall of Fame induction. Gary's name is engraved on the Hall of Fame monument, which sits along the canal in Lewes adjacent to the Lightship Overfalls.

Gary loved the beach and loved to surf fish. This is also why he moved to Lewes in 1984. His love of surf fishing led him to fall in love with the Outer Banks of North Carolina in the 1960s. Gary bought a timeshare on the beach in Kill Devil Hills that he has traveled to with his family every year since the early 1980s. The family was fortunate to spend two weeks there with Gary in 2021, not knowing it would be Gary's last visit there with his family.

Gary's condo in the Outer Banks is a peaceful, memory-filled place for Gary's children and

grandchildren and is a place where they will continue to honor their love for their beloved father and Pa Pa each year.

Memories of Gary will be cherished forever by many, many people.

A memorial service will be held on Saturday, February 19, 2022, at 10:00AM, at Parsell Funeral Homes & Crematorium, Atkins-Lodge Chapel, 16961 Kings Highway, Lewes, DE, where friends may visit beginning at 9:00AM. Friends may also visit on Friday, February 18, 2022, from 3:00PM to 6:00PM.

All who cannot attend in person are invited to join the services via Livestream at the following link: <https://webcasts.lifetributes.com/1193046>

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic social distancing protocols must be observed and masks must be worn by everyone participating in any aspect of the service.

Fort Miles always had a very special place in Gary's heart. Anyone who wishes to honor Gary's memory could do so with a donation to Fort Miles Historical Association, PO Box 52, Lewes, Delaware 19958, or www.fortmilescha.org. Gary's memory could also be honored with a donation to the Lewes Junction Railroad & Bridge Association, PO Box 705, Lewes, Delaware 19958, or www.lewesjunctionrr.org. Gary was always so appreciative of any donations to both organizations.

Please sign the virtual guestbook located on the tribute page.

Previous Events

Flowers

FEB 18. 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM (ET)

Parsell Funeral Homes & Crematorium-Atkins-Lodge Chapel
16961 Kings Highway
Lewes, DE 19958

Visitation

FEB 18. 3:00 PM - 6:00 PM (ET)

Parsell Funeral Homes & Crematorium-Atkins-Lodge Chapel
16961 Kings Highway
Lewes, DE 19958

Visitation

FEB 19. 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM (ET)

Parsell Funeral Homes & Crematorium-Atkins-Lodge Chapel
16961 Kings Highway
Lewes, DE 19958

Memorial Service

FEB 19. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (ET)

Parsell Funeral Homes & Crematorium-Atkins-Lodge Chapel
16961 Kings Highway
Lewes, DE 19958

Tribute Wall

LD

“ Dr. Wray was my 8th grade Social Studies teacher at Dover AFB Junior High School which was part of the CR school district. He was my favorite teacher & the reason for my life long love of history. Because of Dr. Wray, I went on to receive my degree in History & Museum Studies. I was an attendee at the annual Delaware Tourism Luncheon in 2008 where he was recognized as Volunteer of the Year. I was fortunate to be able to speak to him for a few minutes afterwards to tell him what an impact his teaching had made on my life. A truly remarkable man. My sincere condolences to his family.

Lorraine J Dion - March 11 at 11:04 AM

NK

“ Dr. Wray was my college professor at Wilmington University in an undergraduate class. He was a terrific story teller and made history come alive. He taught student to think for themselves and gather multiple perspectives to get the full picture. This influence me to do the same in my classroom as an educator in elementary. If not for him, I would be doing a disservice to our young youth with terrible social studies practices. Thank you for being a great inspiring educator. You will be missed.



Nolan katz - February 27 at 10:16 PM

SS

“ I had the pleasure of working with Gary over many years in many different activities, and yet as I think back, I was always discovering a different facet of Gary. He certainly was an interesting fellow -- driven, smart, opinionated, and fun. As I get to that point of life where less is in the future than what has been in the past, I regret not spending more time with Gary, learning more about him and from him. Like most of us teachers, Gary relished informing others, building on experience and learnings while helping people understand their own past and potential futures. A life well lived!

Steve Schwartz - February 23 at 09:09 AM

BD

“ We, Betty and Butch Daugherty, have been so fortunate to have known our good friends Nancy & Gary for so long. We, too, are West Virginians. Nancy and I went to South Charleston High School, and continued on to Morris Harvey College (now the University of Charleston). When Nancy met Gary in college, we all met Gary.

We were fast friends throughout life, and we had so much fun together. We remember our road trips to Philly and New Jersey beaches in 1962; our Austin Healeys; weddings; babies; Fredericka; Covey Creek, Andrews Lake, and Wild Rabbit Run.

The Lewes community has lost a valued citizen whose contributions will be long lasting. We thank Jessica, Robin, and Katie for organizing so beautifully the Celebration of Life and get-together afterwards.



Betty & Butch Daugherty - February 21 at 02:02 PM

TC

“ Prayers to Dr Wrays family. he made an lasting impression on me as a 8th or 9 th grade student at Milton Jr High in the Mid 70s Great teacher/ counselor

Tony Crivella - February 12 at 12:19 PM

DP

“ Sending hugs and prayers to the families of Dr. Wray, who interviewed me in Columbus, Ohio to join the Cape team. He remained a strong encourager for the past 30 years.



Dr. Doris Person - February 11 at 10:37 PM

CB

“ To the family of Gary: I am so very saddened by the news of your fathers passing. To think that he wrote such a thoughtful and heartfelt message on my husbands tribute wall (James H. Bastian, Jr.) days before he left us all. He was such a thoughtful and good friend and contributed to our schools and community in so many ways. His knowledge of history and his time serving so many projects are endless. He and Jim had so much in common and they shared their love of West Virginia. My children have so many memories of his kindness as their teacher. Jim and I always had so much respect for his knowledge in so many projects and community needs. He was always so happy to greet us and we loved him so much. He will be missed and remembered always as a true community leader and educator. I pray for your peace as you remember all of your precious memories.

Charlotte A. Bastian

Charlotte A. Bastian - February 11 at 09:45 PM

LH

“ Jessica, Robin and Katie-
Sending hugs and deepest condolences from both me and my mother. Your dad (and mom) were so special to my mom (and dad) and we were so sorry to hear of your dad's passing. I have heard many mentions of your parents from their days at Morris Harvey and then their early years in Delaware. They were special friends to my mom. While it has been many years since they've been in touch, please know that my mom sends her love. I have fond childhood memories of your dad and remember him as a happy, gentle man with that lovely West Virginia "draw". You and your families are in our thoughts and prayers.

Love,

Laura (Miley) Hughes and Gail (Cavender) Miley

Laura Hughes - February 10 at 08:11 AM

DA

“ Dear Jessica, Robin and Katie and families, We were so very, very sorry to hear of the passing of your wonderful father. He was an incredible inspiration to many, many people and he will be greatly missed beyond words. With getting to see him at Wilmington University, we shared many talks through the years and I always loved "catching up" and finding out about his latest projects and adventures. With my husband being from the same place in West Virginia, we shared numerous stories about the beautiful area and our latest West Virginia vacations. And, his love for learning was contagious. But, the best part of our conversations and when Gary was truly beaming the most is when he shared his family memories, current and upcoming times with his family. After he would leave, I would always be reflecting on how much fun the talk had been, new history interests, and my utmost respect for knowing he is one of the best fathers and grandfathers! Gary's love for life will live in our hearts forever...Dana Abbott-Painter and John Painter

Dana Abbott-Painter - February 09 at 03:28 PM

KC

“ Dear girls,
I want to send our condolences to you with the passing of your father. Your father was one of the dearest friends I worked with and socialized with while I worked for the Cape Henlopen School District. Your father was hired to serve in the District Office the same night I was hired as Supv. of Personnel.

During our years of working together, I trusted in your father's advice and accepted his thoughts as he helped me to gain strength to deal with personnel issues. We traveled on recruitment trips to various colleges all over the East Coast to recruit teachers for the District. We shared hundreds of stories, opinions and jokes as we traveled in the old "blue bomber" car of the District. Your father could recognize a great teacher when he saw one and worked with the Board and me to get that individual to come to Cape.

I loved and respected your father as a co-worker and a friend. I know he is visiting in the sky with many of our friends who have gone before us. If you listen quietly, I am sure they are singing, "Oh, those West Virginia hills, how majestic and how grand!"

May God bless you at this time. Dwell on the wonderful times you shared with your father!

Dr. Earl & and Dr. Karen Cannon
Rockingham, VA

Karen Cannon - February 09 at 12:15 PM

BW

“ My deepest condolences to Jessica, Robin, and Katie and their families. Your father was on the committee that interviewed and hired me when I applied to Cape Henlopen High School in the summer of 1989. I always had a great deal of respect for your father. We shared a love of history and teaching. The Cape Henlopen community has lost a dear friend. I hope the memories you hold will bring you comfort in these difficult times. Sincerely, Bill Walls

Bill Walls - February 09 at 09:12 AM

RG

“ I first met Gary in 2005 over a three-hour cup of coffee. His vision and positivity convinced me to join his efforts to start the Cape Henlopen Education Foundation (CHEF), which has since become state's premier educational foundation. An encounter with Gary always left me feeling how lucky we were to have his enthusiasm for making the community a better place. He provided the compass for the rest of us to follow.

My wishes of health and spirit to his family in this time.

*Rick Grier-Reynolds
President , CHEF*

Rick Grier-Reynolds - February 09 at 08:10 AM

TP

“ As a Wilmington University Graduate, I had the opportunity to have several history classes taught by Dr. Wray. He made a lasting and positive impression on me. It was a joy to listen to his lectures. After graduating I still maintained contact with Dr. Wray. As I look back at my life and all of the teachers I had, I've come to the conclusion Dr. Wray is my favorite. To his surviving family, I'm sorry for your loss. He was a wonderful person with such great personality.

Timothy W. Priest

Timothy Priest - February 08 at 10:09 AM

CW

Our deepest condolences to the Wray family. We first met Gary while living in Covey Creek. Over the years, we became so impressed by his keen mind and love of history. That history love extended over into his love of community. He made a lasting impression on many people in the Lewes/Rehoboth area. He was truly an Icon! He was so very proud of his girls and was a wonderful father. We haven't seen much of Gary in the past years since moving from Covey Creek but when we did see him, he always greeted us with a warm smile. It was always a pleasure to run into him in town somewhere. I believe Jessica is the one who graduated with our daughter, Mandy and niece Cathy. We know you have many precious memories of such a fine father and we pray those memories bring you much comfort during this time of loss. May God hold you in the palm of his hand.

Bob and Carol Wright

Carol Wright - February 18 at 07:33 PM