

Obituary for Laurence C. Keeler

LAURENCE CARVER KEELER
1929-2016

Laurence Carver (“Larry”) Keeler was born on August 21, 1929 in Evanston, Illinois and died on January 21, 2016. Larry was the eldest child of Joseph Frank Keeler and Esther Grace (McKibbin) Keeler. He spent his early years in a log cabin built by his father in northern Wisconsin along with his only sibling, Dorothy (now Hash), of Wylie, Texas. Larry has the not-so-unique honor of descent from the Mayflower pilgrim group. His mother belonged to the family of John Carver, the first governor of the Plymouth colony. Every generation of her family since 1624 has had a son with the middle name of “Carver.”

The family moved to Milwaukee in the early years of World War II where his father found work as a janitor in a large apartment building before becoming the operator of a small trucking line. Larry did many different kinds of odd jobs during his teen years to earn money, sometimes more interesting than profitable, and earned his pilot’s license when he was 16 years old. He spent eight years as a fireman and engineer on the Milwaukee Railroad. This was followed by a job with General Electric which necessitated a move to the Dallas, Texas area where he covered five states as a traveling industrial x-ray technician serving large industrial manufacturing companies and government contractors. While eating lunch one fall day in Shreveport, Louisiana he spied a certain young lady named Patsy Braswell of Oak Grove, Louisiana who he claims to have been instantly smitten with. He began an ardent pursuit across a thousand miles of air, land and unfriendly locals before closing the deal on the match he always told friends was the best he ever made. They were married 56 years.

Marriage and the birth of their daughter Vivian soon followed. In 1964 they moved to Kansas City where he worked with Greb X-Ray Co. for nearly 30 years, the last 27 as pilot of the company plane. In 1995 he was given the opportunity to return to his first love, railroading. He and Pat moved to Pierre, South Dakota where he worked six years as conductor and locomotive engineer for the Dakota, Minnesota and Eastern Railroad. He loved working for the railroad and on retirement at age 72 his employer had made and presented to him as a farewell gift a specially built-to-scale train car carrying his name and company work number, taken as a sign of respect for his dedication and skill. He always considered himself the luckiest of men in that he got to indulge himself in two careers, trains and planes that other men [boys] envied. He and Pat returned to Overland Park in September, 2001, to live at Metcalfe West Condominium.

One of Larry’s lifelong interests and loves was music. He taught himself to play guitar and was pretty good at it; he also did a creditable job on the clarinet, bassoon and piano. He had a good - often described as mellow or smooth - singing voice some said was similar to Jim Reeves, and was a favorite in the “jamming” groups of country-western entertainers around Kansas City.

Another interest was model railroading. The basement of his Overland Park home was filled with an elaborate model railroad he had designed and built. It was a frequent gathering place for the local model railroading community and attracted visitors from around the world. He developed many friendships there that have lasted decades.

Larry is survived by his wife Patsy of the home, daughter Vivian and her husband Mark Lindgren, of Ft. Smith, Arkansas, and their children, Laura and Michael.

A celebration of Larry’s life will be held on Monday, January 25, 2016, at 10 a.m. at the Johnson County Funeral Chapel, 11200 Metcalf, Overland Park, followed by a committal service in the Mausoleum room. Suggestions for memorial contributions in his remembrance are Crossroads Hospice of Kansas City and Wayside Waifs,