

FRANK RABEY

1932-2017

GREENVILLE, N.C. – He was both jokester and Depression-era pragmatist. A cut-up, a card. A contrarian of the very first order.

He was a lover, above all, of family, including his pets, and of travel, classical music, the pursuit of learning across life, vegetable gardening, homemade pierogies and Pilsner Urquell beer; he was a hater of hypocrisy in all things.

He could be boisterously charming, as well as unsparing in his pronouncements, including that longstanding family favorite, “Get on with it!”

Regrettably, for those of us who knew and loved this complicated tapestry of a man, on Sept. 26, 2017, Frank Rabey followed that oft-deployed piece of his own advice, for the very last time. His tough old ticker – with its wildly wayward rhythms that were, for many years, thankfully no match for his profound zest for life – finally beat, erratically, its last. Frank died of heart failure, at age 85.

Per his wishes, no formal public ceremony took place to mark his passing; family and closest friends gathered the following Saturday at his longtime Greenville home, to celebrate Frank's rich life. A private family ceremony will be held in the spring, to scatter his ashes in his beloved backyard garden.

Frank's story is a fundamentally American one. He was born in Binghamton, in upstate New York, on Jan. 10, 1932, to Michael and Anna Rabey. The couple, originally Michael Riaby and Anna Musák, immigrated to the United States individually in the early 1900s from what was then Austria-Hungary, but which now, for Michael, would be the Slovak Republic, and for Anna, the Ukraine. Though growing up only about 50 miles apart, they would first meet in Binghamton.

Frank was the youngest of 10 children, with both parents dying while he was still a child, working themselves to death in the



THE BROTHERS RABEY: December 1942 in Binghamton. Andy, left; Frank, then age 10; Mike; Bill, kneeling; George; and Paul. John alone is absent here.

shoe-manufacturing sweatshops in and around Binghamton. He would grow up intensely poor, raised intermittently by his oldest brothers, and through the generosity of neighbors. Frank often recounted catching fish in a local river to feed himself some days.

Each of his six brothers would serve in some branch of the military during World War II; all made it through the war, though brother George, a pilot, died in flight exercises in 1943, shortly after his return stateside, the first of the Rabey siblings to pass away.

Brothers Michael, William ("Bill"), Paul, Andrew ("Andy") and John, and sisters Margaret Bertuzzi, Helen O'Brien and Mary Kosta Dimmick, all also preceded Frank in death.

Frank would enlist in the U.S. Army shortly after high school, soon after sent to fight in Korea. He would later also serve a short tour in Vietnam, though as a member of the medical corps, working in a M*A*S*H unit laboratory.

Following his return home from Korea, Frank met his future wife, Jeanne, then Jeanne Eaton, while working as an Army recruiter in Jeanne's hometown Olean, N.Y. They would marry Sept. 21, 1957, and would be together 60 years, until his death, having three children.

Frank retired from the Army in 1975, with the rank of Major; his military service would be among his life's proudest achievements. The family moved then from his station in San Antonio, Texas, to Greenville, where Frank embarked on a second career, as a professor of laboratory science with East Carolina University (ECU).

He is responsible for a couple of generations of the best laboratory technicians eastern North Carolina ever saw. Frank was a notoriously tough instructor, Army-trained and passionate. Most graduates of his program loved him, for his wit and wild charm, and his hard-won respect, but even those who at first hated



MILITARY MAN: Frank in 1965, in Binghamton.

him for his unbending demands – and there were more than a few – grew to begrudgingly appreciate him when they realized, in their early employment, how markedly better trained they were than even more job-seasoned techs. Frank believed he was teaching his students to help save others' lives, and he would not abide failure.

He retired from ECU in 1996. His later years were filled with adoring grandchildren; classical music concerts; genealogical research; travel (he had profound affection for New York City); and his bountiful vegetable garden. His homegrown tomatoes were the stuff of tomato-sandwich dreams.



FAMILY MAN: Frank and Jeanne in December 1967, in Tucson, Ariz., with Frank William, age 1; Marlyn, 8, top; and Michele, 6.

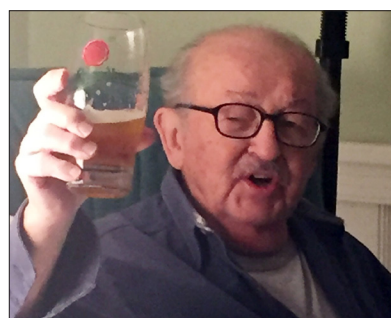
Frank is survived by his wife, Jeanne, and by daughters Marlyn Rabey-McCuaig, Michele



Rabey and her wife Sue Ehrlich, and son Frank William Rabey and his wife Lisa Carraway Rabey, as well as by Marlyn's son Ryan, daughter Torre, daughter Kiley McCuaig Moore and her husband, Danny Moore, and their two children, Hadley and Sean; by Michele and Sue's son Dylan Rabey Smith and his wife Rachel Lacy Smith, and their newborn daughter Scarlett; and by Frank William and Lisa's children, Taylor Holloman and Luke Rabey. Taylor is now expecting Frank and Jeanne's fourth great-grandchild.

Frank is also survived by sister-in-law Katie Rabey Metteer, of Phoenix, Ariz., and Kay's daughter Karyn Rabey Bates and son John Rabey; by nephew Bill George Rabey, of Binghamton; by niece Anna Rabey Shamma of Binghamton, and Anna's daughters Amal and Hada, and son Muthenna; and by nephew John Anthony Kosta II and wife Jan of New York City, and their sons John III, Todd and Michael, and daughter Kristy.

Should you desire to honor Frank and his robust and consequential life, the family asks that you make a contribution to some worthy community or cultural organization of your choosing. Frank was intensely passionate about the arts – especially



live classical music performed locally, including ECU's Rudy Alexander Performing Arts Series, and intimate concerts at The Music House – and organizations supporting animal rescue. In particular, Frank loved his golden retrievers; a donation to your state's golden-retriever rescue association in his name would be an especially appropriate legacy.



THE LOVE OF HIS LIFE: At top, Frank with Jeanne at the Playboy Club in New Orleans, 1965, and dancing at granddaughter Kiley McCuaig Moore's wedding reception in Greenville, 2013. Immediately above, the couple during a 1957 visit to Frank's sister Margaret and brother-in-law Louis Bertuzzi in Oneonta, N.Y.

Requiescat in pace, Pops. You were that rarest of rare indeed.