

Joseph A. Heller, Jr.

1937 - 2019



Joe Heller made his last undignified and largely irreverent gesture on September 8, 2019, signing off on a life, in his words, “generally well-lived and with few regrets.” When the doctors confronted his daughters with the news last week that “your father is a very sick man,” in unison they replied, “you have no idea.” God thankfully broke the mold after Joe was born to the late Joseph Heller, Sr. and Ruth Marion (Clock) on January 24, 1937 in New Haven, CT. Being born during the depression shaped Joe’s formative years and resulted in a lifetime of frugality, hoarding and cheap mischief, often at the expense of others. Being the eldest was a dubious task but he was up for the challenge and led and tortured his siblings through a childhood of obnoxious pranks, with his brother, Bob, generally serving as his wingman. Pat, Dick and Kathy were often on the receiving end of such lessons as “Ding Dong, Dogsh*t” and thwarting lunch thieves with laxative-laced chocolate cake and excrement meatloaf sandwiches. His mother was not immune to his pranks as he named his first dog, “Fart,” so she would have to scream his name to come home if he wandered off. Joe started his long and illustrious career as a Library Assistant at Yale Law School Library alongside his father before hatching a plan with his lifelong buddies, Ronny Kaiser and Johnny Olson, to join the Navy and see the world together. Their plot was thwarted and the three were split up when Joe pulled the “long straw” and was assigned to a coveted base in Bermuda where he joined the “Seabees,” Construction Battalion, and was appointed to the position of Construction Electrician’s Mate 3rd class. His service to the country and community didn’t end after his honorable discharge. Joe was a Town Constable, Volunteer Fireman and Ambulance Association member, Cross walk guard, Public Works Snow Plower and a proud member of the Antique Veterans organization. Joe was a self-taught chemist and worked at Cheeseborough-Ponds where he developed one of their first cosmetics’ lines. There he met the love of his life, Irene, who was hoodwinked into thinking he was a charming individual with decorum. Boy, was she ever wrong. Joe embarrassed her daily with his mouth and choice of clothing. To this day we do not understand how he convinced our mother, an exceedingly proper woman and a pillar in her church, to sew and create the colorful costumes and props which he used for his antics. Growing up in Joe’s household was never dull. If the old adage of “You only pull the hair of those you love” holds true, his three daughters were well loved. Joe was a frequent customer of the girls’ beauty shops, allowing them to “do” his hair and apply make-up liberally. He lovingly assembled doll furniture and built them a play kitchen and forts in the back yard. During their formative years, Joe made sure that their moral fibers were enriched by both Archie Bunker and Benny Hill. When they began dating, Joe would greet their dates by first running their license plates and checking for bald tires. If their vehicle passed inspection, they were invited into the house where shotguns, harpoons and sheep “nutters” were left clearly on display. After retiring from running Bombaci Fuel, he was perhaps, most well-known for his role as the Essex Town “Dawg Kecher.” He refused to put any of his “prisoners” down and would look for the perfect homes for them. One of them was a repeat offender who he named “A**hole” because no owner would ever keep him for very long because he was, in fact, an a**hole. My Dad would take his buddy on daily rides in his van and they’d roam around town with the breeze blowing through both of their fur. He never met a dog he didn’t like, the same could not be said for the wanna-be blue bloods, snoots and summer barnacles that roamed about town. His words, not ours. Well maybe not exactly his words as those would be much more colorful. Joe was a frequent shopper at the Essex Dump and he left his family with a

house full of crap, 300 pounds of birdseed and dead houseplants that they have no idea what to do with. If there was ever a treasure that he snatched out from under you among the mounds of junk, please wait the appropriate amount of time to contact the family to claim your loot. We're available tomorrow. Joe was also a consummate napper. There wasn't a road, restaurant or friend's house in Essex that he didn't fall asleep on or in. There wasn't an occasion too formal or an event too dour that Joe didn't interrupt with his apnea and voluminous snoring. Besides his beloved wife, Irene, and brother, Bobby, Joe was pre-deceased by his pet fish, Jack, who we found in the freezer last week. Left to

squabble over his vast fortune, real estate holdings and "treasures" are his three daughters Michelle Heller (Andrew Bennett) of Newton, MA, Lisette Heller (Lenny Estelle) of Ivoryton, CT and Monique Heller (John Parnoff) of Old Lyme, CT. He relished his role as Papa and Grampa Joe to Zachary, Maxwell and Emily Bennett, Megan, Mackenzie and Ryan Korcak, and Giovanna and Mattea Parnoff and hopes that he taught at least one of them to cuss properly. Left with decades of fond and colorful memories are his siblings Pat Bedard of Madison, Richard (Pat) Heller of Oxford, and Kathy Heller of Killingworth, sisters-in-law, Kathy McGowan of Niantic and Diane Breslin of Killingworth, and 14 nieces and nephews. No flowers, please. The family is seeking donations to offset the expense of publishing an exceedingly long obituary which would have really pissed Joe off. Seriously, what would have made him the happiest is for you to go have a cup of coffee with a friend and bullsh*t about his antics or play a harmless prank on some unsuspecting sap. If we still haven't dissuaded you and you feel compelled to waste your hard-earned money to honor his memory, donations may be sent to: Seabee Memorial Scholarship Association, PO Box 667, Gulfport, MS 39502. A celebration of his life, with Joe laid out in all his glory, will be held on Thursday, September 12, at the Essex Fire Department, 11 Saybrook Road, from 4-7. A light dinner will be served as Joe felt no get-together was complete without food. None of his leftovers or kitchen concoctions will be pawned off on any unsuspecting guests. Feel free to be as late as you'd like as Joe was never on time for anything because of the aforementioned napping habits. Joe despised formality and stuffiness and would really be ticked off if you showed up in a suit. Dress comfortably. The family encourages you to don the most inappropriate T-Shirt that you are comfortable being seen in public with as Joe often did. Everybody has a Joe story and we'd love to hear them all. Joe faced his death and his mortality, as he did with his life, face on, often telling us that when he dropped dead to dig a hole in the back yard and just roll him in. Much to his disappointment, he will be properly interred with full military honors (and maybe Jack) next to his wife on Friday, September 13, at 10:00 am in Centerbrook Cemetery. The family is forever in debt to his neighbor, Barry Peterson, for all of his help in recent years. We couldn't have done it without you. Sorry, Mom, Lisette and I did the best we could to take care of him and keep him out of your hair as long as we could. Back in your court now. To share a memory of Joe or send a condolence to his family please visit www.rwwfh.com Arrangements by the Robinson, Wright & Weymer Funeral Home in Centerbrook.

Published in The Hartford Courant on Sept. 10, 2019