



Ronald Walter Van Asten

June 9, 1941 - March 25, 2024

It is with shock and great sadness that we announce the sudden passing of Ronald "Ron/Ronnie" W. Van Asten, of Burnsville, MN, on March 25, 2024, at the age of 82. A beloved son, father, grandfather, brother, uncle, and friend to many. Ron will be greatly missed by us all.

Ron was born in Appleton, Wisconsin, in June of 1941. He and his four other siblings were raised in nearby Neenah. He was proud of his Dutch and German heritage and was a true "ambassador" for the state of Wisconsin, the cities of the Fox River Valley, and his cherished Green Bay Packers. If you knew Ron at some point you would learn of all and any of the products and noted people who came from this area.

Ron had many talents and interests. He loved learning and was always reading The Wall Street Journal, National Geographic, trade periodicals, and anything related to science, mechanics, electronics, and politics. He was a very funny and social person. His favorite way to spend his time, as he would say, was to "just sit around and bullsh*t with people", play cribbage or cards (especially Sheep's Head, a family favorite), and travel. Ron also had a life-long love of music. Whether listening to a live band at the State Fair or through his Bose stereo in the living room, Ron was always around music: from "old school" WI polka to FM 88.5's "Bluegrass Saturday Mornings", Elvis's gospel to 50's rock, Creedence Clearwater Revival to traditional

country, and classical. Among his favorites were Kris Kristofferson's musical poetry, Hank Williams, Sr., Buddy Holly, Sam Cooke, and Tchaikovsky.

Ron's childhood was not an easy one. He was 2-years old when his father deserted the family, leaving his mother, Ella (Kuhn) Van Asten, to raise five young children by herself. A very talented seamstress, she worked to support the family, but making ends meet was nearly impossible, and the welfare system as we know it today had not yet been developed. More than once the Methodist church and The Salvation Army stepped in to help. At one point, Ella was in a serious car accident that left her in critical condition and in a coma for over a month. All five children had to be dispersed to different family members. Ron was placed with his grandmother Kuhn until his mother could fully recover and bring them all back together under one roof.

One year, returning home from summer camp, Ron learned that his mother couldn't keep their house or his beloved dog, Chubby. Ella took a job at Robert Hall (a noted men's suite store) in Milwaukee, but only Ron and his younger sister moved with his mom. Being separated once again from his older brothers and sisters was very hard on him, and his eldest brother became somewhat of a father-figure to him.

Throughout his childhood, however, Ron displayed significant talent and possessed a knack for electronics and mechanics, often fixing (and disassembling!) things...toasters, blenders, radios, you name it. He even maintained his mom's sewing machine so she could continue working. He was always curious to know how things worked. On his own, Ron ordered, paid for, and assembled a Heath Kit (an electronic radio assembly kit). He also rewired the electricity in the family home at age 12!

It was a challenging neighborhood where they lived. Ron and a friend dreamed of running away and having a life like Davy Crockett, they even

started making plans. However, Ronnie and this friend, while playing with a chemistry set, accidentally started an old, abandoned building on fire. Ron always had a big heart, but this unfortunate and unintentional mishap was "the final straw" prompting a tough decision. Ronnie could either go to reform school or go live and work at a local family farm. He chose the farm. It was hard work, but he enjoyed it.

Ron moved and switched schools frequently throughout his upbringing, including every year between 7th - 12th grade. During high school, he worked 6pm-10pm every day (except Sundays) setting pins at the bowling alley. Ron was never one to complain, and though his 'difficult childhood' is only being touched on, it was these very circumstances, along with his "bullheaded" mindset and unusually gifted intelligence that led him to becoming the strong, independent, hard-working, and determined man that he became. "No pain, no gain" was his motto, and on he went.

Ron initially dropped out of high school (later earning his G.E.D.) but was uncertain of what to do next. Loving his country and always fascinated with aeronautics, he decided to apply to the U.S. Air Force. Ron aced every single aptitude test, scoring 100% on each one, except for administration/clerical test (not his forte, shall we say). The Air Force Officer in charge was so impressed with Ron's capabilities that he wrote a letter on his behalf, fast-tracking him into the new and flourishing computer division of the U.S. Air Force for further training and education.

A long and excellent career at Control Data Corporation (CDC) soon followed. He and an Air Force buddy both wound up at CDC, in the Minneapolis, MN division, and shared an apartment together right off Lake Harriet. He loved his time at CDC working as a Senior Tech Field Engineer, traveling all over, troubleshooting, and repairing computer systems at various sites, with long-

term assignments in Toronto, California, Florida, and Texas.

Some of the mainframes and supercomputers Ron worked on literally took up whole rooms. He talked of being assigned to service calls, sometimes by himself, where he was simply shown the large 'computer room' and told, "It stopped working." Too daunting for many, this situation is where Ron thrived. Diving in with his whip-smarts, binary thinking, and great deductive reasoning he would surface having figured out the elusive problem(s).

During this time, he also met and married Judy (Cline) and they had three children together: Stephanie, Lisa, and Jim. Though he and Judy would later divorce, they always maintained a life-long friendship. Family was very important to Ron, and he was very proud of his children.

After leaving CDC Ron established his own business, Electronic Devices, Inc. (EDI), located in Richfield, MN, where he held the position of president and chief purchasing agent. EDI was a computer systems integrator and built a line of high-performance computer systems for consumers and business use. The company's tag line was, "We serve what they sold you." EDI thrived through the 'blood, sweat and tears' of Ron and one of his most dedicated and bright employees, Jeff Willeck. Jeff would later become Ron's right-hand man in the business and a close friendship ensued. Owning a business suited Ron as he worked hard and didn't like reporting to a manager. He loved people and sales. Ron often had multiple customers buzzing around the office as he figured out the necessary specs needed for a successful solution. He was in his element. After an impressive 10-year stint, and a little soul searching, Ron decided to sell EDI and slowly move toward fulfilling his retirement dreams.

In 1994, Ron met Pam White and they were partners for over 20 years. In addition to many adventures together, they enjoyed dancing and being season ticket holders to local theater and music venues, including Ordway, Guthrie,

Orchestra Hall, and The St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. Ron, semi-retired at this point, worked part-time as a school bus driver at First Student and later the Bloomington, MN, School District. Being the "biggest kid on the block" himself, it's easy to imagine how the school kids loved him! Working part-time allowed Ron and Pam to travel, something they really enjoyed. They flew to many different and interesting countries around the world, including visiting Ron's ancestral roots in the Netherlands and Germany.

In 2021 Ron purchased and moved into a condo within a senior living community in Burnsville, MN, where he enjoyed many new friends and social activities. Ever active, Ron was always doing something, including renting out his properties, dabbling in the trade market, reading up on the latest scientific advancements and current events, and meeting-up with his kids/family for the many birthdays, holidays, and celebrations. It's especially comforting to know Ron spent the last month of his life, in Mazatlán, Mexico, with some people very dear to him, including his nephew, Scot and wife, Vicky, and Pam, whom he always remained close.

Ron was a forthright, fun-loving, and quick-witted person. He talked tough, very fast, and often without a filter, but he was a sensitive man who was loyal, honest, principled, and always rooted for the "underdog." Whenever he spoke it was with a wry humor and always with a twinkle in his eye. Ron in-and-of himself was an experience; 'to know him was to love him.' He will be greatly missed.

Ron is preceded in death by his mother, Ella; brothers Virgil and Guy; brothers-in-law Mike Dorow and Jim Kneifl; sister-in-law Janet; and nephew, Dean.

Ron is survived by his children: Stephanie (Eric), Lisa, and Jim (Denise); grandchildren: Liam, Xander, and Keagan; sisters Charlotte Dorow and

Darlene Kneifl; sister-in-law Jackie; many nieces and nephews; (former wife/friend) Judy (Myles) Johnson; (former partner/friend) Pam White (Robert), along with Laura (Robert) & Aidan Menne; as well as many dear friends he adored and considered family.

A Celebration of Life will be held, details forthcoming. Contributions in his memory can be made to The Salvation Army. A charity organization that provided great help during Ron's upbringing and to whom he 'gave back' and supported throughout his life.