



William Lewis Edelston

May 5, 1923 - February 11, 2021

William Lewis Edelston, whose diverse career and interests spanned that of a trapeze artist, Bombardier flight instructor, mailman, marathon runner, circus volunteer and mentor, died peacefully February 11, 2021, surrounded by his loving family and friends. He was 97.

Born May 5, 1923 to Sol and Viola Edelston in Philadelphia, Willie met his future wife, Anne Nowak, in high school. They became dancing partners, a passion that Willie would enjoy for the rest of his life.

While developing his gymnastic skills, Willie honed his prowess as a hand-balancing partner and later became talented on the swinging rings. However, after the devastating events surrounding the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1942, Willie enlisted in the U.S. Air Force and became a Bombardier instructor for the 473th Bomb Squad. He led 35 missions during the war and retired from active duty in 1945. He married Anne on the most romantic of days, February 14, of the same year. Their 63-year union lasted until her death in 2008.

His circus dreams, which were diverted by the war, were rekindled with a phone call from Willie's longtime gymnastics' friend, Danny Chapman, that resulted in his and Anne's relocation to Sarasota, Fla. to explore circus life.

The Edelstons auditioned as trapeze artists, which resulted in an offer to join Ringling Brothers and Barnum Bailey Circus. Even after their son, Gary, was born in 1950, they continued performing with the Shrine Circus, travelling across the country.

Their second child, Vicki, was born in 1955, After their third son, Tom, was born in 1963, Willie and Anne retired from the circus, and Willie joined the U.S. Postal Service. He worked as a mail carrier until his retirement in 1986.

The Edelstons were blessed with one more child, Eric, in 1963, and while Willie continued his postal career, the circus was still a major part of his life.

In 1962, he started volunteering at Sailor Circus in Sarasota, mentoring young acrobats, a service that he continued for the next five decades. Vicki, Tom and Eric were all active members of the Sailor Circus and Willie coached them, as well as many other students.

“I will forever cherish the moments spent with Willie and will hold all of the life lessons close to my heart wherever I go,” said Anthony Congdon, who graduated from Sailor Circus in 2013.

His daughter, Vicki, said that statement personified Willie to a T.

“Every student who he took under his wing felt his level of dedication and discipline in ensuring that everyone reached his or her potential,” she said.

Willie, not one to remain in retirement, started working at All American Fitness in 1987, and took up running, which culminated with him running a marathon in the 1980s. When running became too painful for his hips, he took up sailboarding, another hobby he enjoyed for 20 years.

He retired from the gym in 2005 to take care of Anne, who was in failing

health. Anne passed away on April 27, 2008.

His circus ties continued throughout the rest of his years. Willie spent a lot of time at Show Folks of Sarasota, where he became close friends with La Norma Fox. As it was throughout his life, there was always a lot of laughing and dancing.

As he fearlessly pursued his interests well into his 80s and 90s, many asked for his secret to longevity.

“Stay fit and keep moving,” he advised. “Hang around young people - they have a zest for life that is infectious.”

Along with his parents and wife, he was predeceased in death by his son, Gary. He is survived by his children Vicki Scarpinato (Gary), Tom Edelson (Linda) and Eric Edelston (Susan); three grandchildren Lisa Elliott, Mandy Esposito (Nick) and Lindsey Dakin (Ethan); great-grandchildren Julie Drymon, Patrick Drymon, Aubrey Esposito, Luke Esposito, Reid Dakin and Lane Dakin.

A funeral service will be held Tuesday, February 23 at 1:30 p.m., at the Sarasota National Cemetery, 9810 State Road.

In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made in Willie's name to the Sailor Circus.

Tribute Wall

SC

“ 3 files added to the album Memories Album



Scott Cannon - March 04, 2021 at 07:25 AM

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“ Willie joined the motley crew at Ocean Boulevard Sailboarding in Siesta Key Village beginning in the 1980s and made our sailing "Fleet 13" so much better for his fine company. He was a wonderful friend and fellow sailor, always full of energy and good humor, and he always came through when it was time to show the younger guys and gals how it was done -- with his famous one-arm pull-ups on the chinning bar. Rest easy, Willie.

Scott Cannon - March 04, 2021 at 07:24 AM

DL

“ So very sorry for your loss. Will always have fond loving memories of Willie.
Bud and Dottie (Lee) Lang

Dorothy M Lang - February 21, 2021 at 04:43 PM