



Walter Birbeck, Jr.
1942-2021
Social Worker
Music and Nature Lover

Dear Friend,

I've been thinking about Walter Birbeck and what words might capture a bit about who he was. He treated his friends like family because we were his family. Walt was an only child and had no children, so that may be why many of his acquaintances and friends felt so very cared about. Walt was attuned to people's needs; he was friendly and warm and always inquired how you were feeling. His chosen profession was social worker, and it was a great fit because thoughtfulness and caring seemed second nature to him.

Walt moved to Mauricetown only about four years before retiring, and that's when most of us in Southern NJ got to know him. He made friends with ease. His love of music connected many people together. In fact I suspect that people who had lived in our region for years may have gotten to know each other through Walt, although he was new to our area. He appreciated the Mauricetown Historic Society and mentioned Irene Ferguson to me with great admiration. Connecting to the local heritage, he

composed songs about Down Jersey. And he and others enjoyed singing them.

When someone was in trouble he was kind and engaging, a good listener. That's not to say he couldn't tease you, but his teasing was without malice. His love of music seemed to stem from his love of people. Usually when a person is singing he is thinking about his performance. He may be in tune with the audience, but he is focusing on his task. Walt always seemed to start out by listening to and honing in on his listeners and the people he played with, so that getting into his set took a wee bit longer.

Walt volunteered time to CU Maurice River. He often came to campfires and shared his musical skills with other musicians. Walt was a regular at Wild About Cumberland, sharing with fourth graders his skills in using a telescope and his love for birds. He was patient and showed respect for the children, treating them as equals. They responded in kind. For Wild About Cumberland he also had a unique undercover task, reporting if a certain friend had found a road-killed deer to hide in the tall grasses, so that raptors might be lured into the fieldtrip area for the children to observe.

Walt was a certified paddling instructor. One of my fondest memories of "Wally Bear," his nickname, took place at Union Lake where he instructed a number of CU members on piloting a kayak. There he helped an adult student, Barbara, who struggled with walking because of challenges caused by her spine. Wally Bear listened to her concerns and reassured her that she would be victorious. His friendly manner and encouragement helped her accomplish her goal – paddling. She proclaimed that this was the first time in years that she had moved unassisted; it was liberating for her. Everyone was moved and elated, especially Barbara. Not long ago she passed and I shared this story in her obituary. When I saw Wally in his favorite haunt, Bogarts, he said, "I read Barbara's obituary, and I remember her willpower." But I remember who gave her the confidence to persevere - Walt.

I called Walter shortly before he was discharged to rehab. He sounded weak but told me he thought he had turned the corner in fighting COVID. He was optimistic that he was recuperating. His perennial encouragement of others also served to lift him, as well.

For the many friends whom he has helped and who he unwillingly left behind, let me share that he would expect no less from you, as well: to keep up the good fight and enjoy life, to celebrate your friendships, and to sing. To Wally Bear's many close friends I offer my condolences, and these words: "Carry on."

Sincerely,



Jane Morton Galetto
CU Maurice River Board President



Walter Birbeck, Jr.

May 22, 1942 - January 17, 2021

Walter Birbeck Jr., age 78, of Mauricetown, NJ, passed away on Sunday, January 17, 2021, from complications arising from a COVID infection.

Walter was born in Philadelphia Pennsylvania on May 22, 1942, the son of the late Walter and Mary Jane (Mitton) Birbeck. He grew up in Philadelphia, attended St. Athanasius School, St. Joseph's Preparatory School, and was graduated from St. Joseph's College in 1964. After a year of graduate work at the University of Pennsylvania, Walter enlisted in the USMC in 1965 and was discharged with a Captains rank in 1968. His primary overseas station was Iwakun Marine Air station in Japan where he was an air traffic controller during the Vietnam conflict.

After his return from the USMC, Walter worked as a social worker first with the Philadelphia State Hospital and then with PMHCC (Philadelphia Mental Health Care Corporation) from where he retired in 2012.

While at St. Joe's Prep and at St. Joe's College, Walt rowed on the crew team. His high school team competed in an international competition in Japan. At St. Joe's College, he was also the co-editor of the school newspaper, the Hawk.

In Philadelphia Walt was a member of the Philadelphia Sailing Club where he became a licensed skipper leading trips on the Chesapeake Bay and in the British Virgin Islands. His love of canoeing and kayaking resulted in a long membership association with the Philadelphia Canoe and Kayak club.

Looking forward to retirement, Walt moved to Mauricetown, NJ in 2008. There he spent his time writing music, singing, hiking, birding, paddling his kayak, and generally enjoying rural life along the Maurice River. He was deeply loved by many musician friends in the Bayshore area whom he invited to join him to play his musical compositions about his adopted home, it's environment, and folklore. He always encouraged and welcomed both the professional and the beginner at his well-known Sunday music sessions. Walt was an active participant in local organizations such as Citizens United to Protect the Maurice River, Bayshore Center At Bivalve, and the Mauricetown Historical Society.

A COVID compliant memorial service, followed by a repast is currently planned for Saturday, May 22, at noon. The service will be held at Mauricetown Park, High Street on the Maurice River in Mauricetown, NJ, and the repast at a nearby resident.



If you would like to hear "Wally Bear" sing
[CLICK HERE](#)
If the link doesn't work visit Bogart's Cafe on
Facebook and scroll to one of his performances.

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