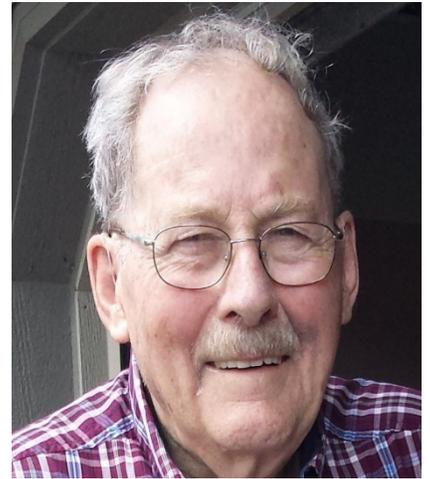


Harold H. Geerdes

May 3, 1925 - September 25, 2021

In Hebrews 12 we read: "Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat the right hand of the throne of God."



We are here today to say goodbye. We have lost a good man named Harold. Harold has joined the great cloud of witnesses, saints who have gone before us in the faith. The book of Hebrews pictures these saints surrounding us, cheering us on, encouraging us to stay faithful. As they do, they are reminding us that perseverance often wins the race. They're quick to add that Jesus is not only our traveling companion, but also our final destination.

As we pause to say goodbye to Harold this day, we remember the impact he has had upon our lives. Back in high school science class, we were asked an intriguing question: If a tree falls in the forest, and there's no one around to hear it, does it make a sound? That's a tricky one. The answer seems to be *no*. I want to change that question, though, and ask instead: "If a tree falls in the forest, does it have an impact?" Does its tumbling down let light pour onto the forest floor and allow new plants to spring up and grow? Hopefully the answer is yes.

And how about us? Sadly, we too come tumbling down. For Harold it happened at the ripe old age of 96. It came after years of struggle with prostate cancer. When Harold was first diagnosed, he was given only a short time to live. But don't forget, this was a man of remarkable perseverance. Adjustments had to be taken. Moves had to be made. This proud man endured any number of changes.

I remember once bumping into Harold at Hy-Vee. It was early in the morning. There was a sale on Progresso Soup - \$1 a can. I'll admit it: I like Progresso Soup. I wanted to get some while the getting was good. But who was there ahead of me in line? Harold. He must have had 50 cans of soup in his shopping cart. All I could think to say was, "Harold, I hope you saved some soup for me." He chuckled. Sure enough, there was plenty of soup on the shelf. And I found out later that Harold actually took that soup home and stored it in his dishwasher. I'm not exactly sure why, but maybe it was for safekeeping. For those of us who are insiders, that's how valuable Progresso soup can be!

Harold persevered, much like he'd done throughout his life. Like that tree in the forest, the question today is not whether anyone will be around to note his falling. Rather, the question is: did his life and death have an impact? How will we remember him?

Harold was born on a farm in the Stewartville area. Along with two sisters and two brothers he grew up during the Great Depression. The family - like so many families - did what they could to get by. Harold and his brothers raised a pig and entered it in the county fair. They won a blue ribbon. So, they loaded up the pig in a Model-T and took it to the MN State Fair. After the fair, they sold their prize pig and took the money home to mom and dad.

Harold made an impact. When he got older, he went to work in the shipyards in Bremerton, Washington. He sent money home to support the family. Next he joined the United States Marines in California: 24th Marine 2nd battalion. Only a back injury kept Harold out of combat in World War II.

Harold made an impact. After moving back to the Rochester area, she spent 50 years working as a painter and paperhanging. He regularly put life into architect Glenn Miller's designs. They made a good team. They produced any number of beautiful homes.

Harold made an impact. He married Carol. Three children came along. Harold was their cheerleader, part of the great cloud of witnesses. Each one of those children left a mark. Jim had an artistic side. He made jewelry. He loved to go fishing with this dad. Despite some personal struggles, Harold encouraged him every step of the way.

Kris remembers getting involved in painting, carpentry, and landscaping projects with his dad. He was influenced by his dad's patience and guidance. In one family story, Harold was asked if a board was on straight. With a mixture of exasperation and playfulness, Harold responded: "Nail it! It ain't going to Hollywood!" To this dad, Kris remembers the pride his dad showed in his work. A part of him wishes they had a chance to work together again.

Bryn had an athletic side. She remembers her dad being her #1 fan. He'd come to her softball games with a church pew cushion, a big bucket of drinking water, and a cowbell. You better believe that cowbell was ringing whenever anything good happened for the home team. Harold was an innovator. Once, during a rain delay, he went to the store and bought some plastic trash bags, cut holes for the arms, and kept the girls as dry as he could. That was his job. He was a #1 fan and was cheering them on.

Bryn had lofty aspirations of running the 100-meter dash at the Olympics in Munich. She was in a qualifying event in Beatrice, Nebraska. She thought she had qualified for the finals, but her name was not on the list. And she had no coach to make her case. As the final was about to begin, who should come walking down the center of the track but Harold Geerdes. He talked to the track officials. He was not about to let that race begin until they reviewed the results and gave daughter Bryn her proper due. The officials reversed course. Bryn got her chance. She ended up finishing fourth, so there would be no Olympic competition for her. But like both of her brothers, she had the joy and satisfaction of a dad who would do almost anything for his children.

Harold made an impact. He had a soft spot for children, and not only his own. He was a favorite uncle for lots of the cousins. Croquet, fishing, card playing, pheasant hunting. He took an interest in their lives.

When Harold turned 90, Bryn remembers one last fishing trip that she and her dad and good friend Nate took to Linn Lake Resort in South Dakota. They caught some walleye and fried them up for dinner. For a few days, at least, it was just like old times.

Harold made impact. As time passed, however, things got harder. Kris used to go with his dad to worship at Zumbro. They normally sat in the back row. Eventually Harold had to move to Madonna Meadows. One Saturday he announced that he wanted to go to church the next morning. We had renovated our sanctuary. I had showed him pictures, but he hadn't seen it in person. Saturday night was exciting. There were puzzles and games of 500 and great expectations for the day to come. But by the next morning, instead of going to church, Harold ended up in the emergency room. From there he went to St. Mary's Hospital. And from there to Season's Hospice.

Harold hung on for a long time. He persevered. More than once I read to him Paul's words to a young co-worker named Timothy as Paul neared the end: "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Now there's a crown of righteousness waiting for me."

Harold had made an impact. He'd finished the race. He'd kept the faith. Now he has joined the saints who are cheering us on, encouraging us to stay faithful. Harold is in the arms of Jesus, who is not only our companion in the race of life, but also our final destination. As I see it, there's no better place to be than the arms of Jesus. Amen