



Donald Eugene Hilgers

July 12, 1934 - December 30, 2023

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly... so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.” --- From the Theodore Roosevelt Award given to Donald by IBM upon his retirement

On the evening of December 30th, 2023, Donald Eugene Hilgers left the shores of this earth after 89 years to be with his Savior, dying in the hospice unit of Texas County Memorial Hospital in Houston, Missouri.

He was born on July 12th, 1934, to William E. and Emma Lenore Hilgers (nee Hudgens) in St. James, Missouri. His siblings were John, Bill, Joyce Cornelius (nee Hilgers), and Charles.

His first job was in the one-room Coffman School, earning pennies a day. He would rise early and walk from the family farm to the nearby schoolhouse. He lit a fire in the stove and swept the floor, making it ready for the day. After graduating St. James High School, he started taking classes at Missouri School of

Mines and Metallurgy (Missouri S&T). However, because of the Korean war, he joined the Air Force in February 1953 serving as a ground radio repairman. Sadly, his father died, so in September 1955 he received a hardship discharge and returned to St. James.

One day he saw an advertisement for a radar operator on the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line in Point Barrow, Alaska. He said, "You know, for two cents, I'd take that job." A friend threw a couple of pennies on the table, and Don was true to his word. However, the complicating factor was that he had recently fallen in love with the woman who would become his wife, Patricia Ann Hilgers (nee Hertlein). As she was in the Lutheran School of Nursing and not allowed to marry, Don started working in Alaska.

When he returned and she graduated, they celebrated Holy Matrimony on May 26, 1957, in Cuba, MO.

His next key employment opportunity was as a field engineer with IBM in Kansas City, MO. He was soon trained to be a system engineer, which would become his life's occupation, climbing thru its ranks until he reached consulting system engineer, the pinnacle of his profession. While in Kansas City, Pat gave birth to their first son Michael Gene Hilgers on Easter Sunday 1962. Seven years later, when he was assigned to accounts in Canton, OH, Pat bore Jeffrey Eric Hilgers on George Washington's birthday. In their lives together, Pat and Don lived in Fishkill NY, Kansas City MO, Canton OH, San Jose CA, Springfield MO, San Francisco CA, St. Louis MO, and ended in Rolla MO. Don often quipped that IBM stood for "I've Been

Moved”.

He retired from IBM after 35 years and went to Canada to learn how to build log houses. With wife and friends by his side, he devoted himself to building his home out of 53 one-ton logs using only his chain saw, wood carving tools, a couple of tractors, and a backhoe he bought at a garage sale.

In 2003, Pat had a stroke in the speech center of her brain leaving her with expressive and receptive aphasia. In a moment, her ability to communicate underwent extreme upheaval. He studied aphasia and became a teacher and therapist, trying to help Pat to talk, listen, and understand again. Yet, through it all, the door of their home remained open, their table was always full of guests, and spare beds were ready to accommodate friends and family.

Don was an adventurer. He visited all 50 states and many of the national parks. He hunted in the heat of the Texas bush and fished in the frigid waters of Great Bear Lake. He had a deep passion for Harley Davidson motorcycles and spent most of his life his riding wherever the wind would take him. He loved white-water canoeing and wilderness camping. He was especially fond of taking his boys on fly-in fishing trips to remote lakes in Canada and of leisurely houseboat trips with dear ones on the northern boundary waters.

His greatest loss was on May 17th, 2022, when his beloved wife and helpmate, Pat, died.

He is survived by his brother Charles Hilgers and by his children and

grandchildren: Mike and Lois Hilgers
(nee Gornet), their son Benjamin Hilgers, and their daughter Abigail Perkins
(nee Hilgers, who is married
to Addison Perkins); Jeff and Cindy Hilgers (nee Knapton) with their children
Sierra Varney, Jackson
Cravens, and Sophia Hilgers.

There will be a Celebration of Life on Saturday, March 2 with a short
ceremony at 2:00 and a reception
afterwards. Details to follow. Those wishing to donate in his name, please
contribute to Concordia
Seminary (<https://www.csl.edu/give/>).

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

MAR 2. 2:00 PM (CT)

Hilgers Home
12815 County road 7160
rolla , MO 65401

There will be a celebration of the lives of Don and Pat Hilgers on Saturday, March 2 at the log home they built. A brief memorial service will be held at 2:00 with a reception to followed. Plenty of food, drink, and dessert will be provided. Please plan to join us and share in the memories of good times in the lives of Don and Pat. The home is located at 12815 Co Rd 7160