



Joseph T. Lyons

December 7, 1926 - February 26, 2020

Joseph Timothy Lyons, who blessed his family and others who knew him with his compassion, sharp wit and irresistible charm, passed away on Feb. 26, 2020, in Rockledge, Fla., not far from the house where he had helped raise his six children. In his final days, surrounded by family, he sang, joked and recounted stories from his extraordinary life. He was 93 and relished each of those years on a path that brought him to meet, among other notable figures, Elvis Presley, Ronald Reagan, a Canadian prime minister, a Taiwanese premier and the original seven astronauts. A successful newspaper publisher and avid nature lover, he quietly donated much of his time to causes ranging from helping injured wildlife to mentoring abused and neglected youth. He was born in 1926 in Philadelphia, one of 12 children in a family that left a remarkable legacy on the Main Line. His father, James Stanislaus Lyons, was a successful businessman, bicycle racer, performer and instrumentalist. His mother, Mary Rebecca Brennan, had been secretary to the commanding officer of Philadelphia Quartermaster and an organist at St. Denis Church in Oakmont for 30 years. Joe and his siblings endured a riches-to-rags childhood due to the Great Depression and the death of their father in 1934 at age 59. On his 17th birthday in 1943, Joe left high school and enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps. After Parris Island, he was sent to Okinawa, meeting up with his brother John, a Navy sailor, at Pearl Harbor on the way to war. In the Pacific Rim, Joe received a telegram that his mother had two weeks to live and returned home just before she passed. The Lyons' children were left to raise themselves. As an honorably discharged World War II veteran, Joe finished high school at Haverford, enrolled in Lincoln Prep and was working part-time at the storied Lyons Bros. Hardware in Ardmore. In 1948, he took a summer job in Maine as first mate on advertising executive Ward Wheelock's schooner, the ill-fated Margot II. At the same time, Joe graduated from Charles Morris Price School and was pursuing a career in advertising. He kept his summer job aboard the yacht for four years until 1952, when he and seven others, including Wheelock, survived a powerful storm that struck as they were 230 miles northwest of Bermuda. Towering waves and 70 mph winds snapped the 60-foot schooner's two masts. As others huddled below, Joe and the captain crawled on the deck cutting the riggings from the splintered masts that could sink them. The crippled vessel limped stern-first to Bermuda in a 26-hour trek through fierce weather. Joe

never returned to the vessel, which was rebuilt, renamed and vanished in the Bermuda Triangle three years later with Wheelock, his wife and five others lost at sea. But the real turning point in Joe's life came in March 1950 when his unassailable integrity and high principles met their match. He and his brother Nick, who would be his best man, drove to Fort Dix with two young women they just met — part of a church group performing a musical for soldiers. On the way home, Marion Elizabeth "Betty" Chamberlain, a pianist and English major, held Joe's hand. They married in October 1952 and moved to Florida, with four kids, where he became an advertising salesman for the St. Petersburg Times. In 1966, he moved to the East Coast and became national ad manager at Gannett's newly formed Today newspaper. He was promoted to president and publisher in 1973 and went on to lead Gannett papers in Fort Myers, Fla., Springfield, Mo., and Wilmington, Del. In November 1980, when Joe left Wilmington to take a job with the Hearst Corp. as publisher of the Times Union and former Knickerbocker News in Albany, N.Y., then-Gov. Pete du Pont of Delaware sent him a letter: "I speak for the entire state of Delaware in saying that you will be missed," the governor wrote. Through much of their adult life, Joe and Betty immersed themselves in theater productions, especially musicals, often dragging their children along as extras. Music was ingrained in their life, and family gatherings usually ended around the piano. Whether at a nightclub or social gathering, Joe's Irish tenor voice captivated audiences. He sang Ave Maria at his children's weddings and his humor was disarming — in a room full of business associates or to a waiter delivering food. His family knew him as "Buck," "Gramps," and "Woodrow," a nickname given to him by his sons in honor of the stoic Texas Ranger Capt. Woodrow F. Call, a character in one of his favorite novel's, Larry McMurtry's Pulitzer Prize winning Lonesome Dove.

He is predeceased by his wife, Marion C. Lyons. Survived by one of his older brothers, Thomas, and his children, Colleen Golub, Shane Lyons, Denis Lyons (LoAnne); Timothy Lyons; Christopher Lyons (Cynthia); Brendan Lyons (Christina); 13 grandchildren, Jennifer Berman, Rachel Lyons, Christopher Golub, Tara Steele, Conor Lyons, Tyler Lyons, Makenzie Lyons, Marion Lyons, Joseph Lyons, Nicholas Lyons, Katherine Lyons, Shannon Lyons, Jack Lyons; and seven great-grandchildren, Jasper Berman, Naomi Lyons, Delilah Berman, Ella Golub, Lindsey Hodgson, Dean Golub and Lance Steele.

Joe's Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated by Rev. James Walsh on Friday March 13, 2020 at 11:00 am at St. Pius X Church, 23 Crumitie Road, Loudonville.

Private burial will take place with military honors in St. Agnes Cemetery, Menands.

Cemetery

St. Agnes Cemetery, Menands
48 Cemetery Avenue
Menands, NY, 12204

Events

MAR
13

Mass of Christian Burial

11:00AM

St. Pius X Church

23 Crumite Road, Loudonville, NY, US, 12211