



Donald Ray "Fred" Foster

August 11, 1944 - October 26, 2021

To some, Fred Foster was a man of few words. For that facet of Fred, the simple facts were all that were needed. Born Aug 11, 1944 in KS. Died Oct 26, 2021 in AZ.

Yet for those lucky enough to have a chance to sit with him when there wasn't work to be done, you might have heard some great stories. There were ones from his mischievous youth, from his service abroad, from his observations of animals/birds, and from his travels. He would also tell stories that had been shared with him by various family members or some of the many friends he has from around the country and world. He had a story that could connect to almost any topic of conversation and once he got going, the story would unfold with copious details and perhaps a side story or two. For that facet of Fred, his story was something like this...

Robert "Lee" and LaVerna "Vernie" (Greathouse) Foster's fifth (and final son) was born in their home, a farmhouse near Wauneta, Kansas. Donald Ray's birth weight, almost 13 lbs, was the largest of any of their 15 children. By the time Don came around, his oldest sister (LeOpal) was setting off for missionary work, his second eldest sister (Nina Belle) was married and made him an uncle before he turned one. The family had mourned the loss of the precious infant twins (Ima Lou and Ila Sue) whose time on earth was brief, yet whose impact was great. He was grouped in with his two brothers who were 2

- 3 years older than him, making the set David, Dan, and Don. Their older sisters Lucy, Carol, and Sally (6-9 years Don's senior) were just old enough to keep the boys in line and dote on the family's baby girl (Mickey). The older children were in high school (Bill and Mary) or upper grade school (Nan and Mack). They were essential in keeping things running at the farm. Taking care of family was interwoven into their everyday life. Don developed a hard work ethic and a desire to help where he could while completing the farm chores and working for various neighbors. It was while assisting a neighbor that he had his first brush with death, they were repairing a cistern when a butane explosion destroyed the home. Don helped those in the home to safety and sustained 2nd and 3rd degree burns. When he started wearing glasses, he would tip them so they didn't rest on his ears because he was tender there from the burns.

During his school years, he 'helped' a friend with her math homework while she took care of his writing assignments on the long bus ride home. He played center on the High School football team. He graduated from Sedan High School in May of 1962. He received his Associate degree in Electrical Engineering from Independence Community College in June 1965. Knowing that graduation most likely meant being drafted, he was a regular at the local recruiters' offices. "If you are considering the Marines, I can save you the trouble and kill you right here and now" advised his brother, David (a Marine). Not thinking that a farm boy would be comfortable on a Navy ship he decided to join the Air Force. A choice that would take him across the globe with limited involvement in active war zones.

Don spent most of his 20-year Air Force career overseas. For the first part of his career he was in Communications; he was stationed in Japan, Germany, and the remote island of Shemya, Alaska. He worked on teletype machines. It was these loud machines, co-workers with similar sounding names (Ron, John, Tom), and an inside joke involving the name Fred Johnson, that

followed him from Japan to Germany, that led to him to be known as 'Fred'.

One of his few stateside posts brought him to Mountain Home Air Force Base. It was there he met a dance partner that eventually became his life partner. Arline Patricia Fry was a Registered Nurse working at the VA hospital in Boise; and she came to Mtn. Home for a night of square dancing. He was amused, when he asked her to dance for the first time and her face turned as red as the heart necklace she was wearing. Knowing what they each wanted out of life and in a spouse, they were soon engaged and married on November 20, 1976, just before he was stationed to Lakenheath, England. Their first home was in the village of Thetford and they used it as a base to explore various historical sites throughout the British Isles and Germany. During that time, Fred underwent surgery/treatment for a urinary condition that impacted his kidneys. The surgery was successful and with lifelong care he was able to keep the impact of the condition minimal. Fred's military career shifted from Communications to Avionics Maintenance. He attended evening classes through the European Division of the University of Maryland and in May 1979, Fred completed his Bachelor degree in Business. In May 1980, the couple's first daughter, Jennifer Arline, was born. This is what ended Fred's long run of owning pickup trucks and sporty cars.

When Arline was 6 months pregnant and Jenny was nearly two, Fred made arrangements to purchase a house in Hampton, Virginia through letter correspondence and a quick trip, ahead of him being stationed there. Arline took Jenny and set up the house before Fred joined them a month later. It was good timing, because Debra Ray decided to enter the world 6 weeks early. The doctor's office being separate from the hospital and a power outage in the area resulted in a somewhat harrowing drive to the hospital that involved going through traffic lights and over curbs. Fred ensured everyone made it there safely and Debbie joined the family. Fred's quick wit and humor were put

to good use as a father. At around three years of age, Debbie decided that she didn't like milk. When Dad offered "Moo Juice" with a twinkle in his eye, both girls eagerly said yes! Debbie was quick to regret her order.

As Fred's 20 years of Active Duty came to a close, the family considered "what's next?" Fred and Arline decided to return to the place they met, where there were dear friends, and a nice place to raise a family. In 1986, after two road trips across the country, the family settled in Mountain Home, Idaho, on Holiday Drive. Fred took on a Civil Service job which afforded him the opportunity to train airmen. He was a gifted instructor and encouraged his students to think beyond the single section that they were assigned. Graduates of his courses were known to be knowledgeable and adept. When moving to Idaho, Fred and Arline wanted to ensure that their girls had a sense of the broader world, and they took advantage of travel afforded by their Shaklee business. They also made trips to National Parks and often would travel to see friends and family. In turn, family and friends often came to visit, and if they did, one thing could be sure, they would get to see something of interest! Whether it was the Bruneau Sand Dunes, Three Island Crossing, the family's favorite Dog Creek campground (with hot springs and tubing the river), or any of the other sites of interest that Idaho had to offer. Fred often did the driving for these travels, and it was uncanny how much wildlife he would spot at great distances. One was often wondering how much he was watching the road.

Fred was a family man, and did much to hold down the fort at home. If Fred put on his blue apron, you knew things were going to get done. He baked, cooked, cleaned, sewed, did laundry (often to hang dry on the clothesline), and took care of the yard. He was always busy with something. When the family built a home on North 5th East Street, several rows of raised garden beds lined the backyard. His garden always had a bountiful harvest of tomatoes, zucchini, and rhubarb. Fred was also a man of faith. After attending

Mass regularly with his family for many years, he became Catholic and was often seen working behind-the-scenes at parish events. He was a regular at most breakfasts or dinners hosted by the Knights of Columbus, and while never a member of the group, he made their events run smoothly and filled in wherever he was needed. He found fellowship with a men's faith group which met weekly for over 15 years. Fred was a handyman. He could fix almost anything (or could say when it wasn't worth saving). When Jenny joined the Colorado Vincentian Volunteers after college, Fred fixed a broken lamp that was in her room by collecting pieces from around the house. The Directors of the program never forgot his repairs of something they thought was a lost cause. Similarly, when Debbie was moving into the college dorm her freshman year, some of the fellow parents/students thought that he was part of the school's maintenance team because he was vacuuming, giving directions, and helping students rearrange/fix things. Fred showed his care and concern by doing. When there was work to be done, he is who you wanted on your team. Mountain Home's Chamber of Commerce named Fred "Man of the Year" in 2010 to acknowledge his contributions to the community.

After both girls had graduated college and left home, the time came to leave Mountain Home. Fred and Arline built a beautiful home in the neighborhood of Josephine's Crossing in Billings, Montana. They loved hosting friends and family that came through, and quickly got to know that area by showing others around and learning about their new community. It was at this time of their life that grandkids appeared on the scene. Ambrose was born in Denver in 2011, he was a happy baby with a contagious smile that seemed to grow bigger when his "Poppy" was around. In October of 2012, Fred, Arline, Jenny, and Ambrose drove to Kansas for the annual Foster Family reunion. Fred's cousin, Bob O'Dell, restored the farm's old 1942 tractor and brought it to the reunion. It was hard to tell who liked sitting in the seat of the tractor more, Poppy or Ambrose. Adelaide came onto the scene in 2014, and has adored the toys

that Nanny and Poppy kept just in case a granddaughter joined the family. Ambrose particularly enjoyed when Poppy would tell stories about his time in the military. When reading the “Little House on the Prairie” series, Adelaide liked talking with Poppy about the parallels to his family’s story. Also during this time, Fred and Arline found a new community in Sun City West, Arizona, and made it their second home. They have enjoyed many of the activities and clubs, most notably the Pickleball and Spanish clubs. Many of Arline’s family now also call the area home, including her sister, older brother, and two cousins. Ambrose and Adelaide love visiting Nanny and Poppy at their “Montana house” or their “Arizona house”. They often confuse them, but know wherever Nanny and Poppy are, it will be a good time!

While deciding what furniture would be going to which house, it was evident that Fred was a talented and avid woodworker. He had crafted several pieces throughout his life that had come with him throughout all of his moves, including an end table he made in High School, hutches that display treasures from their travels, a coffee table with an elevating platform, and probably the most iconic: the grandfather clock. All were beautifully created and maintained by Fred.

In October 2020, Debbie’s son, Carter, was born in Butte, Montana. The 4-hours between Billings and Butte felt too far, so Fred and Arline sold their house in Josephine’s Crossing and found a place in Butte. They love watching Carter grow week-by-week with regular visits and Sunday dinners together with Debbie, Nick, and Carter. As Carter has become more mobile (favoring a commando crawl), he would regularly seek out the wheels of Poppy’s oxygen tank to make them spin and inspect the oxygen hoses.

In October of 2021, Fred and Arline began their migration south from Montana to Arizona. They stopped by Denver to see the older grandkids and Mack, his

only surviving sibling, before detouring to Kansas for the Foster Family reunion. This reunion was special in that it was celebrating what would have been his parents' 100th wedding anniversary. They were wed December 24, 1920 and celebrated over 70 years of marriage together. Their memory and legacy lives on. Jenny, Debbie, and Carter were part of the many grandchildren, great grandchildren, and great-great grandchildren at the reunion. Following the reunion, Fred and Arline continued their trek to Sun City West. Fred's already severely impacted lungs experienced a strain at the reunion and subsequent travel. He passed away at home. The second to the last of Lee and Vernie's children to come into the world is the second to the last to leave. There is a void on earth left by this husband, father, grandfather, handyman, family historian, and friend. We will miss him dearly, however, his stories will live on through his family and the many wonderful friends he met along the way.

Funeral services were conducted Nov. 19, 2021 at 10 AM at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church, in Sun City West, AZ.

Burial will be in Friday, July 15th at 10:00 AM in Mountain View Cemetery with Father Thomas Haffey officiating and military honors accorded by the United Veterans Council of Butte.

In lieu of flowers, donate to St. Vincent de Paul or the Butte Rescue Mission.

Cemetery Details

Mountain View Cemetery

3910 Harrison Avenue
Butte, MT 59701

Previous Events

Graveside Funeral Service

JUL 15. 10:00 AM (MT)

Mountain View Cemetery
3910 Harrison Avenue
Butte, MT 59701