

# Klaus Dieter Gurgel

*January 10, 1944 ~ March 12, 2021*

Klaus Dieter Gurgel (January 10th, 1944 – March 12th, 2021) was born in Berlin, Germany, during World War II. The hospital in which he was born was bombed days after his birth. His mother, Anna (“Omi”), would tell harrowing stories of her experiences raising a newborn during those difficult and war-torn times. As his family was recovering financially, they owned a small kiosk that would sell alcoholic beverages. In fact, his family would distill hard apple cider in their basement. During his youth, Klaus would often sample this product, as he said, “not to get drunk, but to get. . .elevated.” The phrase “get elevated” has become one of many “Klaus-isms” or family jokes. As a boy, Klaus would staff his family kiosk, and learned at an early age that the longer he could keep customers present through conversation, the more they would buy. Thus, Klaus developed “the gift of gab” early in life. If you ever ran into Klaus at the grocery store, you may have (reluctantly) received of this gift.

Klaus’ life had a profound pivot when he was sixteen years old. He had a class assignment to do a report on a topic of his choice. He wanted to talk about America, but his teacher, who had no obvious religious affiliation, commented that the topic was too broad and that he needed to focus on something more specific, like an American religion. Klaus had a classmate who was a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Knowing that this Church had a restored origin in American, he chose the Church as his topic. Ever a scholar, he took his topic seriously, sought out the missionaries, and read the Book of Mormon. He soon chose to be baptized and join the Church, which fundamentally changed the course of his life. Clyde Bench, a missionary who was integral to Klaus’ introduction to the Church, became a lifelong friend.

After his graduation from high school, Klaus’ hard-wired “wanderlust” took him to England for a study abroad. He attended church services at his new found religion, and was immediately drawn to the young lady playing the piano, Ruth Lassig. Ruth had travelled from Salt Lake to England to help her parents who were serving a mission there. This was a “love at first sight” story, and was the beginning of what would eventually lead to a 54-year marriage. In her memoirs, Ruth wrote that Klaus’ “cheeks had been scrubbed so much he just glowed.” After attending a fireside that evening, Klaus and Ruth planned to meet later on Wednesday of that week. They had arranged to meet at 5:00 p.m. Klaus arrived at 7:00 p.m. while Ruth had waited two hours to see him. This would begin a lifelong pattern of Ruth waiting for Klaus!

Klaus emigrated from Germany to come to America and be with Ruth. He was hosted by a family in Idaho, where he worked on a farm as a “German cowboy” during his first summer in the United States. When he was able to move to Salt Lake City, he used the only dollars in his pocket to buy Ruth a bouquet of flowers. Klaus proposed to Ruth back in England on their third date. After two years of persistence (perhaps the only time Klaus waited for Ruth) they were married in the Salt Lake Temple on October 16th, 1964.

Klaus enrolled at the University of Utah, primarily to better learn English. He loved learning, and higher education expanded his mental horizon. He went on to earn a bachelor's and master's degrees in Geography, and pursued a PhD in Geography at Syracuse University. While attending graduate school in upstate New York, Klaus' love for Church history deepened. As part of his research, he worked with the Church to survey those who attended the Hill Cumorah pageant and map the distances travelled for those who attended. Following his formal studies, he was hired at Weber State in Ogden, UT, to teach Geography, which he continued as an adjunct professor from 1978 until after his retirement. He was always a professor at heart.

Dad's love of learning was communicated to his children. He spent countless hours reading to each of his children when they were young. We would read in the "blue chair," a rocking recliner that became tattered with time well spent. Dad loved to read and collect things – books, newspapers, magazines. . . coins, basketball cards, stamps, ties, and paintings! He was a member of the Utah Numismatic Society and was recently honored by winning a coin design contest. His design featured historic Cove Fort, and the Numismatic Society recently minted the coin.

In the early 1980's during difficult economic times, Klaus was unable to maintain employment in Geography and meet the family's financial needs. Unemployed, he had a career shift and became a sales representative for college textbook publishers. Due to mergers, those companies included, Mosby, Saunders, and ultimately, Elsevier. While this was not Klaus' first professional choice, he resiliently excelled in this field. His work allowed him to personally interact with college professors, primarily in Nursing, throughout the intermountain west. He earned "Representative of the Year" distinction for the company, and nearly always exceeding his annual goals. His companies provided travel incentives for meeting those goals, which in turn, provided some of our cherished family vacations.

Dad loved people. Soon after meeting someone, Dad would often know, and remember, very specific details about that person's life – where they came from and where they lived, how many children they had, where they went to school, their grade point average. This was one of Klaus' most endearing qualities. Going with him to his favorite restaurants, like Maddox in Perry, UT, was like going with a celebrity. Employees would flock to him, and would never make him wait more than just a few minutes to be seated! He was also an adopted member of the Sons of Utah Pioneers and enjoyed his associations with that group. He also served in many capacities in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and found a lifetime of joy in his membership.

Of all the people Dad loved, he loved his family first and foremost. He was eager to talk about his three children and proud of each of their accomplishments. An interesting thing happened to dad whenever a grandchild was born. His heart was softened with each grandchild, and that child became the focus of his attention, conversations, and official nicknames. In the latter years of his life, it was not uncommon for Dad to be with multiple family members on any given day.

Klaus was preceded in death by his beloved wife Ruth, and parents, Karl Richard and Anna. After nearly three years of waiting for him, Klaus and Ruth have now been reunited. He is survived by his three children, RuthAnne (Brian) Noel, Heidi (Steve) Nestel, and Richard (Kristie) Gurgel, 12 grandchildren, and 5 great grandchildren; and brother, Bernd. We are grateful for the compassionate care of Harmony Hospice care and the workers at Solstice Senior Living as well as the many friends Dad made while living there. We will all deeply miss Klaus.

Funeral services will be held on Saturday, March 27, 2021 at 11:00am at Larkin Sunset Lawn, 2350 E. 1300 S., Salt Lake City. A viewing will be on Friday, March 26, from 6-8:00pm and Saturday, March 27, from 9:30-10:30am both at the mortuary. Interment will be at Larkin Sunset Lawn Cemetery.

To view the zoom services held on March 27, 2021, please click on the following link:
https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/VHV4BLHpO4LdPloPr1AtlwPK3F3XGnO9uy1ZfVWfXqBbYUARGOq4OXaFFv0ntvyp.