

Obituary

“A Slice of Happiness”

Jack B. Allen, 89, of Bloomfield Hills, MI, passed away peacefully on Sunday, May 3, 2020, at Troy Beaumont Hospital. Jack is predeceased by his loving wife of 58 years, Chandra (Camp) Allen, who passed away in 2016.

A legendary character, Jack lit up every room he entered. His warmth, generosity, good nature, and famous sense of humor brought joy and companionship to all those who were lucky enough to know him. He will be dearly missed by his ten children and the family's expansive network of friends, near and far.

Jack was born in Chicago, Illinois, on February 1, 1931, to his mother, Geraldine (GG) Devaney. An only child, Jack was raised by his mother, his grandmother, and his mother's 6 siblings. His Irish grandmother, Mary Kelly Devaney, and uncles Tommy and Sidney were significant influences in his early life. His mother and aunts were talented dancers and actresses who travelled the U.S. as performers in the early Barnum & Baily Circus, and later in the New York City chorus lines of Broadway and in Hollywood films of the 1930s.

Jack attended St. Ignatius Loyola Grammar School and High School in Chicago, where he excelled in football, basketball, and student government. After serving in the U.S. Army during the Korean Conflict, he graduated with honors from Chicago's Loyola University and after that attended DePaul University Law School for a short time on the GI Bill.

Jack had a vast and loyal network of lifelong friends from the Irish neighborhoods of Chicago's North Side. He met his soulmate, Chandra, while working as a bartender in a neighborhood Pub when, by fate, he was 'forced by duty' to bounce her date for being underage. Their early courtship survived a debacle of a first date (garlic pizza; great idea Dad!), and they were married on February 15, 1958. Both only children, they wanted a large family and were blessed with ten children of their own.

After a modest start working in the mailroom of Chicago's WLS-TV (ABC), Jack went on to achieve an illustrious career in television and media. Known for his ability connect with people and quick wit, Jack rose from mailroom attendant to stagehand on locally produced programs, to prominent sales and executive management roles with WLS (Chicago), WABC (New York), WXYZ (Detroit), KNBC (Los Angeles) and WWJ (now WDIV; Detroit), where he led the station as General Manager and provided on-air weekly editorials. In the early '80s, Jack moved his family to Westport, CT to help launch the cable networks Satellite News Channel (SNC; later acquired by CNN), The Nashville Network and The Disney Channel for Group W Satellite Communications, based in nearby Stamford, CT. Thereafter he held senior positions in New York City at Columbia Pictures Television, Lorimar and Orion. In semi-retirement, Jack represented nationally syndicated television programs through his own company, Jack Allen Enterprises, based in Westport, CT and Bloomfield Hills, MI. It's difficult to find anyone in the television and media business during this era who did not know and love Jack Allen.

With his beloved Chandra, Jack raised his ten children with a combination of discipline and humor. He balanced the demands of career, parenting and community with relative grace and always a smile. He never missed a major event in the lives of his children, attending countless sporting events, performances, and educational and religious milestones. The Allen household was a constant gathering place for friends and neighbors; Jack and Chandra shared a remarkable ability to make everyone feel welcome and special.

Jack loved old movies (classic and not so classic), reading history and science fiction, sports of all varieties, 1940's big band music, and most of all gatherings with family and friends. He was a famous patron of the local watering holes where he lived. Jack was the proudest of his sons' restaurant bars, including The Land Shark (East Lansing), The Black Duck and The Willow Room (Chicago), and his home base - Hoops, Sports & Spirits (Auburn Hills). Jack was adored by the staff and patrons of these establishments and was often greeted like a local celebrity. Jack was also a faithful parishioner over the years at the Catholic parishes of St. Joseph's (Wilmette, IL), St. Regis (Birmingham), St. Luke's (Westport, CT) and most recently St. Hugo of the Hills (Bloomfield Hills), as well as a fifty year member of Oakland Hills Country Club.

While greatly admired as a husband, father and friend, Jack's favorite role in life was that of grandfather. After raising his ten children, his 24 grandchildren became his life's focus, to care for, teach, listen to, and emotionally support. Jack's most significant legacy is the joy he has brought into their lives. The Allen progeny is a true testament to Jack's passion for life.

Jack is survived by his loving 10 children: Kelly, Joseph (Nancy), James, Michael (Patricia), Thomas (Kimberlee), Peter (Nancy), Daniel (Amy), Timothy, David (Nancy), and Elaine (Jesse) Daignault; 24 grandchildren: Nicholas Tower, Christopher Tower, Jessica Allen, Kristin Allen, Kevin Allen, Patrick Allen, Jameson Allen, Tyler and Aleyshia Greenfield, Mackenzie Allen, Jack Allen II, Ian Allen, Michael Allen II, Caroline Allen, Julia Allen, Bryan (Jessica) Allen, Bradley (Alexa) Allen, Riley Allen, Duke Allen, Isabella Allen, Sarah Allen, Zachary Allen, and Jackson and Mia Daignault and 3 great-grandchildren: Nolan, Cecilia (CC) and Gloria (GG) Allen.

Regretfully, the Allen Family must postpone traditional services to commemorate Jack's extraordinary life until an appropriate (and memorable) celebration can be enjoyed by his many admirers. Jack had a flair for bringing people from all walks of life together to revel in both the mundane and the extraordinary. When the world returns to a "new normal," his celebration will surely reflect Jack's capacity for merriment with a rousing rendition of his signature serenade, "Waltzing Matilda."

In the meantime, in lieu of flowers or food deliveries, memorial contributions may be made in Jack's honor to one of his favorite causes:

Mission Keep the Faith Bolivia c/o Kathleen Curran, 7484 Deep Run, No 910 Bloomfield Hills, MI 48301, <https://keepthefaihbolivia.org/>

The Town of Westport's Department of Human Services COVID fund 110 Myrtle Avenue Westport, CT 06880, www.westportct.gov/donate