



Thomas Gillen Emde

August 24, 1930 - January 3, 2020

Thomas Gillen Emde passed away on January 3, 2020 at age 89 of natural causes and general orneriness. He was born on August 24, 1930 to Thomas and Neva Emde in Bald Knob, Arkansas. Growing up on a family farm, he learned that money doesn't necessarily make you rich; you weren't poor if you had love and plenty to eat; and no matter how much you hated picking strawberries, it was better than trying to plow with mules. Gillen graduated from Bald Knob High School in 1948 where he excelled in sports playing football, basketball and track. Despite his best efforts, he graduated from Graceland College in Lamoni, Iowa and later earned a teaching degree at Arkansas State Teachers College where he met his future wife Margaret Jane Mason, who was clearly having vision problems when they met. They were married April 1, 1955 initiating the longest April Fool's joke in history until she preceded him in death on October 15, 2009 after 54 years of marriage.

Gillen spent most of his career as an educator in Bald Knob, Arkansas and Cedar Falls, Iowa before retiring after a tenure as the principle of Bullion Plaza Elementary School in Miami, Arizona. Gillen had a well-rounded life which is code word for "easily distracted." He served in the Arkansas National Guard, was a farmer, a minister, an educator, a businessman, and was both a private and corporate pilot. He and Jane traveled extensively throughout the US, Europe and Asia chasing grandchildren and satisfying Jane's itch for travel while staying one step ahead of the revenueurs. Gillen's true passion was music. He was an excellent pianist who enjoyed many styles of music but Dixieland Jazz was closet to his heart. He was a natural musician who couldn't read music but could play virtually anything by ear and had the ability to pick up a musical instrument and be able to play it almost immediately. His children have treasured memories of going to bed as youngsters in Iowa while their father serenaded them from the piano downstairs with George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" or Ray Noble's "Cherokee."

Gillen was a dedicated father of four children, grandfather of seven grandchildren and six great grandchildren. A patient father who admittedly left most of the disciplining to his wife, he still had to raise three rambunctious boys who learned to dread the phrase, "Wait until your father gets home." He taught all his children to drive but, having been a child of the Great Depression, he was also famously tight with a penny. While he provided his kids

with plenty of vehicles to hone their skills on, they were primarily the kind you could dent repeatedly and not really notice. While he was an unexpected animal lover in his golden years, in his younger years was more of an animal tolerator who merely didn't object when his wife or children brought home dogs, cats, a raccoon, ferrets, an owl, a hawk, snakes, lizards, a bat, rats, rabbits, gerbils, and a beaver as "pets." Actually, he did object, but everyone just ignored him. He took it all in stride knowing, eventually, they would finally go to college and leave him in peace.

He is survived by his loving daughter Lece Miller (Robert Miller) of Bald Knob, AR; his sons Brad Emde of Bald Knob, AR; Scott (Lisa) Emde of Tabb, VA; and Jeff (Danna) Emde of Tucson, AZ; his grandchildren Whitney (Miller) West (Joshua) of New York City; Michelle (Emde) Nation (Robert) of Grafton, VA; Rachel Emde of Seaford, VA; Scott Emde, Jr. of Newport News, VA; Damon Emde (Heidi) of Washington DC; and Taylor Emde of Plano, TX; and his great grandchildren Trevor, Cody, Tanner, Mia, Archer, Ellis, Alexandra and Elena. He was preceded in death by his wife, Jane Emde and his grandson, Devon Miller.

Cremation arrangements entrusted to Powell Funeral Home Bald Knob-Judsonia.

www.powellfuneralhome.net

The family will hold a memorial service at a later date.

Comments



“ To the Emde family:
My thoughts are with you as you consider the loss of such an amazing man, and celebrate the life he created for this great family to flourish in. Reading his obituary explains so much more about each of you and my interactions with you over the years. Jeff, in my class from 4th grade on, Scott just ahead of us, Brad being friends with my brother David, Lece becoming my boss at the Bulldog. Even though I think I met your father on just a few occasions, your heritage shines strong in each of you. My thought are with you, and my prayers go up for you as you transition to this different phase of your lives. Blessings!
Leah Oakes Seagraves

Leah Oakes Seagraves - February 17 at 02:38 PM



“ I did not know Mr. Gillen, but I wished I would have by reading his obituary. He sounds like a phenomenal man that was so loved and will be so missed.. ..Eva Jones
- McCrory

Eva Jones - January 09 at 02:28 PM



“ Wonderfully written obituary which captures Gillen’s spirit and sense of humor that all of you share. Great memories of Gillen and my father together. One of my favorites was when my dad had a neighbor pose as a “revenuer” on April Fools day and call Gillen informing him of a pending audit. The joke was so convincing that when my dad came clean, Gillen didn’t believe him! Two great guys, now reunited, swapping stories with Gillen serenading the Angels with his magical keyboard playing. Our prayers are with the family. Our thoughts cherish the memories. Kevin Wallace

Kevin Wallace - January 08 at 10:30 AM



“ I love the obituary you wrote, and feel my dad (John Wallace) would have as well. He loved Gillen and always had a funny story to tell. I think those two shared a lot of laughs! I remember visiting all of you kids at Easter so many years ago, and remember Gillen and your mom fondly. Blessing to all of you right now. We might be holding a small graveside military service for my dad in May.

jodie cleveland - January 07 at 10:46 AM



“ He was a kind and decent man. My condolences!

Travis Jackson - January 06 at 07:49 PM