

Walter Irvin Leberski 2/14/1929 – 10/14/2018

Elko, Nevada



Walter Irvin Leberski suddenly passed away on October 13, 2018. He was born February 14, 1929 to Leocadia Choinski and Irvin R. Leberski. He had one sister Katherine. On June 4, 1954 he married Wanda McWilliams, the love of his life. He and Wanda lived in Ely, Las Vega, Washington DC and Elko. They especially loved the time they spent together at their cabin in Gold Creek. Walt was a third generation Elkoan, a descendant of ranching pioneers. His grandfather, R.A. Leberski and his father, Irvin R. Leberski ranched near Lamoille. When asked about his roots, Walt loved to say,

My grandmother walked here from Missouri. Her dad told her she was too fat to ride in the wagon.

His family stories were garnished with accounts of self-reliance. His parents met in Elko because his maternal uncle moved to northwestern Nevada during the time when establishing a homestead tests a person's mettle. His uncle came from Wisconsin because he got mad at his parents and headed west. His mother came to Reno to visit her brother, met and married his father. The fact that Walt continued to work until his death is evident of the dogged determination to succeed that he inherited from his parents. A retirement party was held for Walt a few years ago. Warner Whipple asked him what he was going to do since he was retired. He said, "Well one thing I am going to go to Reno and see my niece." He got up the next morning and went to work as he has been every morning since. Walt attended the University of Nevada for two years and finished his education at Utah State. He received a Bachelor of Science degree in range management and then went to work for the Bureau of Land Management for nine years. He then went on to establish First American Title Co. and owned it for 16 years. He started working as a paralegal for Vaughan, Hull and Marfisi which later became Goicoechea, DiGrazia, Coyle and Stanton Ltd. Walt had an Australian Shepard dog he loved called blue.

One of the stipulations he made, in going to work for the law firm, was that “Blue” could accompany him to work. Through the years a stray cat decided to make the office his home. Walt complained about having to feed the animal but it was obvious to all in the office that no matter how Walt said he felt about the cat, the two had a real love hate relationship.

Walt was a spokesman and advocate for the Nevada Livestock industry. He was a member of the Nevada Cattleman’s Association and served many years on the central committee and public lands council. Walt and Dean Rhoads were very close and traveled to many conferences meeting representing cattlemen. He continually served as a liaison between ranchers and the Federal Government. It is said that Walt was a genius, especially in the areas of water rights, resources and map making. He knew every square inch of Nevada and its history. He was the, “go to,” person for anyone who needed help in his area of expertise. If he didn’t know the answer he knew where to find it.

Walt was a member of the Society for Range Management during the early years of the Society and the Nevada Section. In 1955 Walt is listed as the Secretary/Treasurer of the NV Section. Though his membership in the Society may have been “spotty” his dedication to the proper management of rangelands and the people that made a living in the brush remained a persistent passion throughout his life.

Walt was a radio control model airplane enthusiast and could be found at the airport flying planes with his dog “Blue” at his side. He took pride in keeping the model airplane strip clean. He spent a lot time, through the years, picking up trash and keeping the area clean. He also loved to shoot. He did all of his reloading and actually made the bullets that were placed in the shell casings.

One of Walter’s favorite stories included his job of wrangling horses for Russ Spainhower in Lone Pine, California for western movies. He and Welford Cline worked on movies together in the early 50’s. He also liked to tell stories about all the interesting people he met while driving a shuttle bus during the annual Cowboy poetry gathering. It was a job that he volunteered for every year. He enjoyed their stories and he loved telling them about Elko’s rich history. Walt loved Rodeo. His involvement began in the 1940’s. He continued to devote his time to the Silver State Stampede because he felt it helped maintain the western heritage. Bill Wines was quoted in 2002,

Walt does absolutely everything there is to do and nothing that he won’t do for us. He is incredible and the Rodeo wouldn’t be the success it is without him.” Walt was honored as the Grand Marshal of the Silver State Stampede in 2002.

Walt was a patriot and served his country as an officer in the United States Army, He was stationed in Austria and Germany and had many interesting stories. It was a memorable time in his life.

Walter was preceded in death by his wife Wanda, Sister Katherine and his parents. He is survived by sisters-in-law, Gertrude Sochurek and Norma Butler, along with nieces and nephews. He leaves behind many good friends. He will be greatly missed.

There were three things that were very important to Walt- his wife, personal friends and ranchers.