



Herbert Graetz

May 30, 1931 - February 6, 2020

Herbert Graetz, 88 passed away Thursday, February 6th with family by his side. He was born May 30th, 1931, in Forst Germany to Reinhold and Martha Graetz. Herbert's life story and experiences could fill a book and all those who knew him would agree that to sum up his life in a paragraph or two, would be nearly impossible but we will do our best to share the highlights of his extraordinary journey.

Herb was born and raised in small town in eastern Germany near the border of Poland. Around 1940, Herb's father and all the men from his town were drafted into the German army and sent to the eastern front never to be seen or heard from again. In 1943 at age 12, Herb and his school mates were tasked to hold off the invading Russians during the Soviet Union's push to invade Germany. Having only small arms to defend their town and the main bridge leading into Forst, they quickly discovered they were no match for the tanks and large artillery coming their way. It was at this time, the entire town, composed of only women and children, fled the town by train to a small mountain village where they stayed for nearly five years. During this time, Herb worked on a farm, raised rabbits and trained as a baker until the end of the war. In 1948, the townspeople returned to Forst which was now controlled by the Soviets. Herb and his friends were quickly drafted by the Soviet's to become border patrol guards. His group consisted of 21 young men, divided into three groups of seven. The group who did not aspire to part of the Soviet Army, devised a scheme to escape. A short time later each group of seven would leave their post one by one and by the end of the day all 21 men had escaped and dissolved into the countryside. The men had escaped their posts, but they were still in Soviet controlled Germany and had work to do. They were befriended by numerous families that allowed them to stay with them in their version of the Underground Railroad. Herb and one of his border patrol friends now worked on a way to get to the US controlled part of Germany. When the night came for the final escape, a young mother and her child that he had befriended, joined Herb and his friend. It was a moonlit night, so they waited for hours in a field until a brief cloud cover darkened the skies. They then crawled on their hands and knees for nearly a mile as they made their way through the countryside in a heavily patrolled crossing until they finally made it to freedom.

While living in US controlled Germany, Herb worked numerous odd jobs while earning

money with the hopes of making it west. During this period, they met a family that had extended family in Canada. Herb and his new friend Dieter Curlis now had a plan. Each leaving a week apart, Herb and Dieter took a long boat ride to Canada then each caught a train to western Canada where they met up again. Once there they took jobs in the oil fields earning money until the ground was too cold to be drilled and there was no more work to be had. Without jobs they decided to head back east and chose to go to Montreal. In part, Montreal was chosen as the destination after pooling their money and realizing that is how far their saved money would take them. They stayed in Montreal for a while each holding separate jobs. They shared a one room apartment where Dieter would work during the day and sleep at night while Herb would sleep during the day and work at night. Herb worked at a butcher shop making deli sandwiches for the night shift at a local manufacturing plant. During this time, Herb also worked as a picture framer, a delivery man and then getting a job at Ford Motor Company where Dieter, who started as a custodian, had been working. It was with Ford that Herb would have the opportunity to move to the United States using their math and engineering skills as designers on special projects. Although the project they initially moved to the States for didn't really pan out they were not discouraged as they were now in America and couldn't be happier. The opportunities afforded to them in Chicago, IL were something they had never even dreamed of. After several different jobs and experiences Herb began working in a new and expanding field of radio frequency sealing, or what we now refer to as heat sealing. He designed and manufactured vinyl bags for the space program and was able to secure numerous patents for his inventions. He started his own company and was a true pioneer in the vinyl field. He made garment bags, pouches and other vinyl products. It was during this time that he attended an industry trade show and had a chance encounter with a man by the name of Ronn Unterreiner. Ronn was in a similar field and had a business in Cape Girardeau called Service Packaging. The two men discussed their shared business interest and developed a plan for Herb to move his business to Scott City, MO and start an even larger vinyl business which they named Blair Industries. This would be a significant venture for both and would set the stage for his biggest business success. Blair Industries opened in 1979 making binders and vinyl products on a larger scale. They soon began making vinyl packaging for audio tapes and VHS tapes. The VHS market was new with tremendous growth potential. After developing and patenting a new way to make VHS cases, they eventually landed a brand-new customer, Walt Disney. Disney needed VHS packaging for all of their movies and Blair Industries was going to be their major supplier. This was big, very big. Blair rapidly expanded to over 300 employees running VHS cases 24 hours a day, six days a week out of their plant in Scott City. It was this account that put them on the map, and they became known as the leading vinyl manufacturing company in the USA. During this time, they also developed and manufactured packaging for religious ministries and other large-scale producers of VHS tapes. Herb remained with Blair until he

retired in 2012.

During his time at Blair and following his retirement, Herb traveled the country and the world for both business and pleasure. Herb went to China, Hong Kong, Australia and all over Europe with friends and family alike. Herb and his traveling buddy, Dominick Palombella, visited Italy numerous times. They visited very small and out of the way towns and enjoyed only the finest food and wine. While in Italy, Herb was fortunate enough to take in three different events with Pope John Paul II including two masses in St. Peter's Basilica and one canonization of a Saint ceremony. When the Berlin wall came down in 1989, Herb was finally able to return to his hometown in the former East Germany. There he was reunited with his sister Renate and others that he hadn't seen since his escape. (Herb was unable to return to Germany when his mother passed away in 1988 as his name was still on a list of escapees.)

While there are many other stories and adventures of his life, we hope that this gives you a little better idea of who Herb was. He lived his life in a low-key manner never looking for attention or the spotlight. Herb was truly a renaissance man, kind and gentle, a man who loved his family and a shining example of how to treat others. His absence will leave a big hole in the hearts of all those who knew him

Herb is survived by his wife Judy Bullock Graetz, and their children Michael (Rachel) Graetz of Dallas, Texas, Lorie (Chris) Armbruster of Galena, Ohio, Joe (Andrea) Bullock of Cape Girardeau and Kevin (Shelly) Bullock of Lebanon, TN. Herb is also survived by five grandchildren, Taylor and Micaela Graetz, Justin and Taylor Bullock, Zack Benton and Neva and Nora Bullock, and two great grandchildren, Ava and Jackson Bullock. Herb is also survived by his sister Renate Ludtke. Others include Uwe and Anett Stock of Forst Germany, sister in-laws Pat Reynolds, Jane Ingram and Jo Rodgers along with many, many close friends.

Visitation will be at Ford and Sons Mt. Auburn Funeral Home from 4 to 8 p.m. Monday with Parish Prayers at 7:00.

The funeral will be at 1 p.m. Tuesday at the funeral home, with Father Allen Saunders officiating. Burial will be at Cape County Memorial Park in Cape Girardeau.

In lieu of flowers, Herb requested that memorial contributions be made to St. Mary Cathedral School, 210 South Sprigg, Cape Girardeau, MO 63701.

Cemetery

Cape County Memorial Park Cemetery

2315 Highway 61 North

Cape Girardeau, MO, 63701

Events

FEB **Visitation** 04:00PM - 08:00PM

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Ford & Sons Mt. Auburn Funeral Home
1001 N. Mt. Auburn Rd., Cape Girardeau, MO,
US, 63701

FEB **Parish Prayers** 07:00PM

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Ford & Sons Mt. Auburn Funeral Home
1001 N. Mt. Auburn Rd., Cape Girardeau, MO,
US, 63701

FEB **Service** 01:00PM

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Ford & Sons Mt. Auburn Funeral Home
1001 N. Mt. Auburn Rd., Cape Girardeau, MO,
US, 63701

Comments



“ I was very sad to hear the loss of Herb. My mother and father loved him and considered him a dear friend. When I was little girl and he would stop by for a visit he would always tease me. So I would tell him to "go home urb". He was a brave and dear man and he will be missed but never forgotten! My love to you and Michael and family at this time.

Terese Ehardt - March 04, 2020 at 01:48 PM



“ Fiery Lily and Rose was purchased for the family of Herbert Graetz.



February 10, 2020 at 12:09 PM



“ Serene Reflections Bouquet was purchased for the family of Herbert Graetz.



February 09, 2020 at 11:18 PM



“ Dreams From the Heart Bouquet was purchased for the family of Herbert Graetz.



February 08, 2020 at 01:30 PM



“ Strength & Solace Spray was purchased for the family of Herbert Graetz.



February 08, 2020 at 11:59 AM



“ I had the honor and pleasure of working with Herb, Ronn, and Judy at Blair Industries from 1982 through 1999. I would first like to thank his family for writing up some of his life's history. If anyone was brave and determined to come to America, with something to offer as well, it was Herb Graetz. His life story is uncomprehensible to the average person, although he always considered himself, from conversating with him, although short of average he was. He was no stranger to each and every one of us at the plant that he and Ronn created. From my level of working with him his intelligence was as high as it gets with always a smile to go along with it. There wasn't a person who worked at Blair Industries that didn't enjoy his conversation. His wife Judy was an important part of the business and always had a smile as well. I have always felt honored to have never met a nicer man, only to be an important chapter of my working career. Who would have thought that this man from Germany who started his journey at age 12 would impact my life in more ways than one, at age 18, in Scott City Mo. While I haven't seen or talked to him in quite some time, his life and unique person he was has always been a good memory of mine. If there was ever a man that returned to his maker it was Herb.

Diane Shipman - February 08, 2020 at 10:09 AM



“ I was privileged to know Herb as I was an employee of Blair Industries for 13 years. He was a kind sweet man. I'll always remember him! RIP Herb!

Becky Kirby - February 08, 2020 at 10:00 AM



“ A great man and most kind friend! Butch Miller

Butch Miler - February 08, 2020 at 09:04 AM