



Dr. Dan B. Cotner

April 11, 1923 - June 15, 2024

When the family threw him a whopping birthday party at age 90, Dr. Dan Cotner seriously questioned why they didn't wait until he was 100. As he flitted about the room having pictures taken in his social butterfly mode, Dan obviously was not prepared to slow down.

He got that 100th birthday party last year. Born April 11, 1923, he died June 15, 2024, at the age of 101.

Known to his grandchildren as Poppi or Grandpoppi, Dan was affectionately described by others as the Energizer Bunny. He kept going and going and going whether on mostly month-long dental mission trips around the world or on musical adventures. Or forays on the river to fish. Dan loved fishing and knew all the best spots on the river.

His salient characteristic was that he was kind to everyone, unkind to no one. He often walked up to strangers and instantly made friends. People marveled at how this five-foot-five-inch man contained so much life.

His Rotary Club mission trips began in 1968 when he drove his wife, Polly and their four children to Guatemala in their RV. That was one of 16 mostly month-long mission trips to underserved regions ranging from Ecuador and Brazil to Kenya, Thailand and India. In Hong Kong, he treated Vietnamese refugees at

a camp.

Rotary International gave him their highest honor.

The Rotary motto is Service Above Self. Dan lived his life that way. He served in the Army in the Philippines in World War II and in the Air Force in Libya during the Korean War. He told of meeting a young Libyan military man named Muammar Gaddafi in Tripoli.

He played trombone in the Cape Girardeau Municipal Band for 77 years and the city honored Dan by naming the band's amphitheater for him. He played organ at Westminster Presbyterian Church, often letting grandchildren sit next to him on the bench and pretend to play. He performed in the orchestra for the Notre Dame musical every spring. He played for the Jerry Ford Orchestra and in Ford's Dixieland band.

His daughter Danna thinks his strong life force was enabled partly by the fact that his parents' first child, Van, died at the age of 1. When Dan was born he became their only child, their standard bearer.

His knowledge was encyclopedic. Long drives were accompanied by a travelogue of sites along the way.

Nobody is certain what inspired his love of music. As a boy he took a piano lesson from Jess Stacy, who played in many bands around Cape Girardeau before moving to Chicago and eventually joining the Benny Goodman Orchestra. Stacy became acclaimed for his performance with Goodman at Carnegie Hall.

As a child Dan often traveled with an accordion to keep in practice.

His granddaughter Darci said Dan was always a source of adventure, usually involving nature and mud. The family cabin on the Castor River was the epicenter of these forays up and down the river and into the woods. And sometimes onto the stage.

Each Labor Day the clan gathered and performed in a talent show christened Castorfest at the small amphitheater they built next to the stone cabin.

Dan was wonderfully colorful and quirky. As a boy Dan had a pet alligator named Carl. As a father he and his wife Polly devoted the family's downstairs bathtub to a large turtle named Jacques. Nature was natural for them.

His wardrobe included wild ties and socks and a hat collection. He had a pumpkin costume, a turkey hat with legs that dangled down the side of his head, and a tie that looked like a piano keyboard.

His granddaughter Devon, an event planner at Disney World, recalls his playfulness. "I remember going down to the breakfast room and playing with the little electronic toys, like the penguins that would climb the staircase and roll down the slide. He always seemed to have as much fun with those as we did."

He went everywhere with Oreo cookies and a 2-liter bottle of warm Sam's Club cola mixed with tea.

The slide shows Dan gave at the cabin were photographs he took on his trips and developed in his basement. Bingo winners at the cabin were awarded wrapped miniature toys he brought home from his trips. Dan didn't even like bingo but he never let on to his grandchildren. He did like to play dominoes.

He had a real interest in forensic dentistry, to the extent he sometimes bit into raw chicken thighs to gauge bite marks.

Oh the adventures. Dan and Polly were on a trip to Thailand in 2001 when rebels shelled their hotel. In Ecuador she obligingly sampled the grubs the natives ate. In Brazil he rode a boat for a week up the Tapajos River from its junction with the Amazon, fishing for piranhas with steel line. Always fishing.

In Pakistan he had dinner one night with Mujahideen rebels.

Dan called his wife, “my Queen” or “my bride.” The grandkids loved seeing him come up behind her and nibble on her ear.

After granddaughter Danica hosted her first solo Thanksgiving dinner at her condo in Kansas City he offered to write a letter of recommendation to any possible boyfriend/fiancé championing her cooking ability. “That seemed like a nice gesture until you realized this came from a man who referred to food as “the green material,” said Danica, a dental hygienist and seller of essential oils.

The “green material” was his request for someone at a family dinner to pass a salad, his daughter Danel verified. The family remembers playing Catchphrase with him and being offered his definition of “quiche” as an ancient Mayan dialect. It is, only it’s spelled k’iche’. Dan told them about the history of the k’iche’ Indians in Guatamala. “This is a testament to the extensive knowledge Poppi had about everything,” his grandson Charles said.

Charles’ wife Caroline said Dan often asked her about her Polish culture. “He was so kind and polite and well-rounded.”

Another grandson, Derek, remembers Dan removing four of his bicuspids at

the family kitchen table in prep for orthodontics. Both Charles and Derek remember losing to their grandfather in footraces.

Dan could fix almost anything and learned to cast jewelry from Otto Dingeldein, who started the Arts Council.

Like the bunny, Dan seemed never to stop moving. Even when sitting he broke into rhythmic finger-drumming. His daughter Danice said her family would ask “What song are you playing?”

Visitors to the Cotner household might be invited to play his stump fiddle, a percussion contraption that was fun to bang on while he played organ.

Darci, a drama therapist, said Dan and her shy 2-year-old daughter Alva seemed to communicate silently.

Until his heart attack the week of his death he was still going to the cabin with his son Paul and daughter Danna to fish in the pond behind the cabin. He always caught fish.

His granddaughter Monica Dean, a TV broadcaster in San Diego, wrote on Instagram: “We love you Grandpoppi and your legacy will live on in us!”

Dan is survived by his children: Dr. Danna Cotner and husband Sam Blackwell, Danice Dean and husband Capt. Larry Dean, Danel Burch and husband Dr. Doug Burch, and Dr. Paul Cotner; six grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren.

Visitation will be from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Friday, June 28, at Westminster Presbyterian Church, 1820 Perryville Road in Cape Girardeau. Matt Palisch will begin playing an organ concert at 12:30 p.m.

The funeral will be held at 1 p.m. at the church with the Rev. Ellen Gurnon. Burial will be at Cape County Memorial Park Cemetery in Cape Girardeau.

Perryville Road is blocked off due to street work. To reach the church parking lot, attendees can take Cape Rock Drive to Ridgeway Drive and on to Brookwood Drive, which exits across from the parking lot.

In lieu of flowers the family requests donations be made to: Rotary Club of Cape Girardeau, P.O. Box 1142, Cape Girardeau, MO 63702; Cape Girardeau Municipal Band, Cape Girardeau Parks and Recreation Foundation, 410 Kiwanis Drive, Cape Girardeau, MO 63701; Westminster Presbyterian Church, 1820 Perryville Road, Cape Girardeau, MO 63701.

Ford and Sons Mount Auburn Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements.

Cemetery Details

Cape County Memorial Park

2315 Highway 61 N
Cape Girardeau, MO 63701

Previous Events

Visitation

JUN 28. 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM (CT)

Westminster Presbyterian Church
1820 Perryville Road
Cape Girardeau, MO 63701

Funeral Service

JUN 28. 1:00 PM (CT)

Westminster Presbyterian Church
1820 Perryville Road
Cape Girardeau, MO 63701

Tribute Wall

KP

“ I grew up at Westminster Presbyterian church and have wonderful memories of Dr. Cotner playing the organ. His fingers seemed to just glide on the keys. My mom would sometimes fill in for Dr. Cotner. I always thought, no one can play better than them! One day we had the pleasure of going to his home and I was totally shocked when he told me he was practicing his music lesson! I couldn't imagine who could teach him more, as he was the best in my eyes. A true gentleman and a scholar

Karen Blyze Paddock - August 25, 2024 at 07:33 PM

JC

“ I worked a couple buildings down from Dr Cotner's office in the 60s. He was my favorite dentist of all time, I'm terrified of dentistry of any kind, but he always told me to hang in there that he wouldn't hurt me and he never did! Cape has lost a wonderful all around human being!

Judi Coleman - June 25, 2024 at 12:52 PM

TF

“ The Field Family purchased the Simply Elegant S pathiphyllum for the family of Dr. Dan B. Cotner.



The Field Family - June 25, 2024 at 11:46 AM

RW

“ Robyn W. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Dr. Dan B. Cotner.

Robyn W. - June 24, 2024 at 09:29 PM

KD

“ *Danna and family it was such an honor to know Dan and to be his pastor for eleven years. He was a remarkable man and a devout Christian. I will be keeping you in my prayers.* ”

Karen Dumey - June 24, 2024 at 11:34 AM