



Raymond Vahey

May 13, 1938 - June 11, 2024

Ray Vahey of Milwaukee died at the age of 86 in his sleep, Tuesday, June 11, 2024, after a brief illness. Ray was born the youngest of four siblings in 1938 in Youngstown, Ohio, and graduated from South High School in 1956. He is predeceased by his husband Richard Taylor, his parents Mary (McCarthy) Vahey and Edward Vahey; and siblings Maureen Eisenbraun, Jean Kenny, and Edward Vahey. Survivors include niece Nancy Knight (Wisconsin) and Carol Bonte (Ohio), many grand nieces and nephews, and chosen family members including Patrick and Kevin Flaherty, Warren Scherer, Josie Osborne, Kim Cosier, and Alphonzo Jackson.

Ray started a job as a messenger boy in high school at Western Union, beginning a career which took him and Richard all over the country, including Cleveland, San Francisco, and the Washington, D.C., and New York City metropolitan areas. He finished his career with Verizon.

Ray met the light and love of his life, Richard Taylor, a veteran of World War II, on a vacation to Cleveland in 1956. Their eyes met on the street, and Richard's Levis and black leather jacket made an intense impression on Ray. Fate intervened, and they saw each other at a café later in the trip, and a romance was born. When they checked into Ray's hotel, the clerk asked if they needed another bed, but Ray told them "no, we'll make out" – and so they did. Thus began a relationship that spanned 50 years until a hospital

wedding ceremony and Richard's death in 2006. They built a quiet life that included friends, art, and antiques during an era of intensely antigay social attitudes.

In the early 2000s, nearing retirement, the couple chose to move to Milwaukee to be closer to Richard's brother's family, and Ray often remarked that his last city was his favorite. In 2005, Ray met the Flaherty brothers at a Center Advocates event featuring Tony Kushner that was raising money to fight a proposed ban on marriage for same-sex couples, marking an exciting new chapter of openness and activism for Ray and Richard. The two agreed to speak against the marriage ban at Milwaukee's PrideFest later that year, establishing Ray as one of the most prominent advocates for marriage equality during the ultimately unsuccessful campaign to defeat the marriage ban. The two spoke at countless churches and house parties as well as the state legislature to stop the ban, and Richard's funeral became a fundraiser for the campaign. Ray would be the speaker, but Richard was the editor and pamphleteer, sharing copies with neighbors and far-flung family, and even the caregivers at Richard's bedside as he lay dying. After the loss of Richard and the ban's passage, Ray became the board president of a newly formed LGBT advocacy organization, Equality Wisconsin, until its merger into a statewide group. Ray often remarked that the activism gave him a productive outlook for his grief. He became outspoken on causes beyond LGBT equality, lending his voice and donations to immigrant rights and progressive candidates. He had volunteer roles at ACLU Wisconsin, Early Music Now and was appointed to Milwaukee's Equal Rights Commission by former Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett.

A celebration of Life will take place on Saturday, July 13th from 1-3 PM at the Astor Hoel, 924 East Juneau, Apartment 624, Milwaukee, WI 53202. If you would like to honor Ray's memory, please take the vow that Ray and Richard made to each other in 2005: that as long as you draw breath, you will speak

out against injustice. Please consider a donation in Ray's memory to some of his favorite causes, including the ACLU of Wisconsin, Voces de la Frontera, and the Milwaukee LGBT Community Center.

Previous Events

CELEBRATION OF LIFE

JUL 13. 1:00 PM - 3:00 PM (CT)

the Astor Hotel
924 East Juneau Avenue, Apt. 624
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Tribute Wall

AG

“ Hey Uncle Ray, it's Andrew. I'm sad you passed away but you'll live on in our hearts and memories. I miss you so much, I'm happy you're with your family in heaven now though. Thank you for being like another grandpa towards me by coming to visit us for Christmas and other family events we had. I miss you so much Ray, I hope you're life down here was amazing just as much as we loving you by us. Love You Ray and Rest easy best friend.

Andrew Geordan Greene - July 10, 2024 at 10:38 AM

SS

“ My husband Al Schrager and I loved Ray and his husband Richard Taylor. They were nonjudgmental, kind men; two of our favorite buyers at the Gallery. Ray once told me "Love is wonderful, wherever you find it." It was a privilege and visual delight to visit their Astor Hotel apartment. Rest in peace Ray, with your beloved Richard

Susan Gorak Schrager - July 08, 2024 at 09:24 PM

JA

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



jody armata - June 28, 2024 at 02:36 PM



“ Thank you Ray for letting us be a part of your life, sharing your wisdom and love.

Christine Neumann-Ortiz - June 16, 2024 at 05:49 PM