

## John L. Evans Ph. D.

May 6, 1930 - March 11, 2018

Dad, John Lewis Evans Sr of Winter Springs, Florida, died peaceably March 11, 2018, at 4:45 PM, with his devoted wife Barbara at his side. The long time professor of history at UCF was 87.

He is survived by 5 extraordinary daughters – Banning Radler, Catharine Grigsby, Annabelle Stiffler, Atlee Swartz, Annie Bieschke, and son, John Jr. Further, he has 18 thriving grandchildren. Lastly, to culminate, or catalyze, his legacy, he has 4 great grandchildren and counting.

Since 1971, when Poppy took a job as professor at UCF (then FTU), he has been predicting success for Knight football teams. Moreover, since his days at Haverford Prep, he loved the Philadelphia Eagles. What a perfect year for the die-hard fan to make his exit. Maybe this is the year of his beloved Phillies too?

Dad relished history, keenly interested in the big sweep of events that shaped man's life. Like his Dad, he attended Yale, and went on to earn a Master's degree from Georgetown, and a PhD from the Univ of North Carolina. He served in the Korean War and learned Russian at the Army Language School in Monterey. His dissertation focused on perhaps one of the great 'What if?' actors in recorded history: Mikhail Petrshevsky. The Russian 19th century revolutionary led an unsuccessful coup attempt against tsarist autocracy. He

and his cadre had examined, among others, French and American models of independence. Dad was curious - What if Petrshesky had been successful? We would have a very different Russia, and world.

The classroom, whether at Saint Albans School earlier in his career, or the university, is where he came alive. Big ideas and forces that sculpted the human experience mattered the most. And getting those ideas conveyed with zeal, so a student could improve the scope and quality of his/her perspective, was the high aim. And it was a big deal to Poppy, where all of his professional energy was invested, along with authoring 7 scholarly books. His regularly led student trips to Russia were a thing of legend.

Yet the essence of Dad's life was family, the sine qua non. He loved his tribe as much or more, than anybody. Now, whether he distributed and demonstrated that love well, well, that's a messier question. But just who does? If love is supreme and sovereign, Dad's cup overfloweth. And all of us in the family were the fortunate beneficiaries. He spoke glowingly, always, of his parents and four siblings, including best friend/brother Glen, surviving at 92. Honor thy Mother and Father? A simple commandment for Poppy. Further, I know of no husband more devoted to his bride, Barb the Great, than Poppy. Their covenant, spanning 33 years, was inspirational! A beaut! For Heaven's Sake, she too was a Russian scholar and Ivy League tennis captain. How idyllic a dyad.

His sanctuary was a camp in Northern Maine, called Bellevue, founded by ancestors in 1864. Here's where he shone. You see, the happiest moments in Poppy's life were leading a family hike up Mount Aziscohos or to mystical Big Rock, or playing family doubles on the picturesque tennis court his grandmother had constructed in the early 20th century of grey Maine clay, or rowing to Bottle Point on Upper Richardson Lake. As a naturalist, Poppy found peace in nature, and I don't think many people have logged more miles on back-wood trails of Northern Maine or Central Florida than he.

Dad was a Monet painting. When you looked closely, he was messy. Signature professorial eyebrows, unruly whirling dervishes, were, as he'd like to say, indicators of his virility. His tie, if being worn, might have a slight ketchup stain from a McDonalds on University Blvd, and rarely matched the jacket and slacks, which were not likely creased. He'd munch on a hot dog at a Spring Training baseball game with the fervor of an affable hyena. I remember one of his cars, a VW Rabbit with a bumper sticker reading, "Here Comes the Sun," had an actual hole in it, where I could see pavement. Up-close appearances just didn't matter to the man. But if you step back, and look at the painting, God's creation, you see beauty. You experience a fragrance of the Almighty. You see a man with tremendous love in his heart. Usually messy, always sincere.

In fact, Dad was incapable of insincerity. A blemish or a blessing? It's a complicated world, and in a sense, Poppy was not complicated. There was no inclination to be nuanced. No time for such adminsitivia. It's as if his Modus Operandi was implicit, "I love you soooo much, that it doesn't matter if I am gruff!" All you had to do was speak up, to communicate. And he would forgive as fast as a light switch, never holding a grudge. Sincerity and grudgelessness, not a bad pair of attributes. I'm ok with the ketchup stain.

Another characteristic that ought to be recorded of the historian – an altogether infinite interpersonal curiosity. I remember being in cabs, listening to his unremitting, tho disarming, questions of our cabby, without fail generating a positive vibe with the driver. Poppy wanted to know what was going on with every cabby he came in contact with. It was instructive and glorious to experience as a child. I try to follow his example; I think it makes the world better.

To close, our Monet could confound with an insightful and incisive remark that

would stop you in your tracks. Or he could read your mind on the tennis court, hogtying opponents with mesmerizing angles and pinpoint placement. Then at a later moment, he'd put the ice cream in the fridge, oblivious to the freezer's role. I love that about him.

Bye Dad, Our Beautiful Monet.

We love you.

# Previous Events

## Mass

MAR **24**. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (ET)

St. Stephen Catholic Church  
575 Tuskawilla Road  
Winter Springs, FL

# Tribute Wall

TD

“ I was also looking up Dr. Evans while thinking about my time at UCF. Dr. Evans was the highlight of my time and my favorite professor at UCF when I was there getting my History degree. It seems like just yesterday that I was sitting in one of his night classes listening to his lecture during the first half and then having a great discussion with him and the other "regular" history majors in the class.

You could tell that he had a soft spot in his heart for us "regulars". That and his style is what kept bringing us back for his other courses. He had the same delivery in the late '70s as he did decades later. "Condominium or Confrontation?!?" I loved it.

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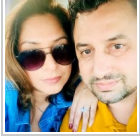
**Terry Dwyer** - February 20, 2021 at 10:32 AM

DZ

“ I've been working with my 18 year old son as he prepares to apply to colleges for next fall, and I always tell him about the influential professors I had when I was in college at UCF. Even though I was a chemistry major, Professor Evans always leaps to the top of my mind when I think of who inspired me the most. I had him for the required Western Civilization class, and was so taken with his knowledge and teaching style that I took his 20th Century Soviet History course during my final semester in 1986. I recall fondly the way he would repeat a sentence 3-4 times to drive the point home. And when he assigned essay exams, he demanded they "be thick, thick...not thin"! He was demanding of students, and really wanted them to develop insights rather than memorize the facts he presented. He was, and remains, one of the brightest points of my education at UCF. I was very sad to see his obituary here. Thanks to his son John Jr for composing such a wonderful tribute to his life.

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**David Zembower** - September 08, 2020 at 11:25 AM



“ *Dr. Evans was a legend among history majors when I was at UCF in early 2000s.*

*I took him 6 times for Russian, Soviet, Chinese, and Japanese history. His delivery was the greatest.*

*"You gotta know that, man!"*

*John cranks!!*

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**Jeff Dockswell** - May 30, 2020 at 01:30 PM

HH

“ *I was just looking up Dr. Evans while reflecting on a book about Peter the Great & found the obituary & this tribute site. I was a History major at UCF in the early 90's and I absolutely loved Dr. Evans' classes on Russian and Soviet history. He was a fascinating teacher, and didn't tolerate any nonsense. I can still remember some of his hilarious sayings- "You gotta know these dates! If you don't know these dates, it's like you're driving down the road and then you run into a ditch where big snakes will bite 'cha!" I've used that on my own kids and students who didn't want to learn dates, but I just don't have the "delivery" that Dr. Evans had.*  
*R.I.P.*

*-Holly Hansen*

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**Holly Hansen** - May 15, 2019 at 12:46 PM

MH

“ *One hell of a History Professor, will always remember him with great love and appreciation for his teaching style. Thank you Dr. Evans and may you RIP. Michael Hanners History B.A. 1987*

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**Michael Hanners** - April 13, 2019 at 10:14 PM



“ *Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of John L. Evans Ph. D..*



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March 23, 2018 at 03:02 PM