



DONORS:

Patricia and Fred Dahl, Dennis and Rosalina Grisco, Kim Grisco, Tom Kessler, Natalie Nicholson, Stel and Michelle (Grisco) Pavlou

DON WAS A FALCONER FOR LIFE.
It was a major part of his character.



L-R: Jim Yester, Bob Hatfield, Don Grisco, Briane Grisco, Yvon Chinaud, (kneeling) Ken Weeks, Johnny McNichol



Don working on a perch in the 1980's.



Don and Maria at their wedding.



Don in 1963.



Don's custom perches made of redwood and pine in 1963.



The Grisco's in 1963.



Don with old friends.



Christmas 1961 L-R: Redtail & Don Shortreed, Prarie & Don Grisco, Northern Goshawk & Bill Linde, Prarie & Dennis Grisco, Harris Hawk & Doug Bryan



DON GRISCO IS A NAME YOU MAY HEAR MENTIONED AT A FALCONRY MEET.

That's because he set the standard for handcrafted, swivel block perches. In fact, his design revolutionized the block perch. And though it has been many a year since the last Grisco perch was created, they remain prized possessions among falconers yet today.

Don was one of 10 siblings — six boys and four girls — and he was right in the middle of that pack as the fifth-born. When the family moved from Chicago to California, it opened the door to a familial interest in falconry.

It started when one of the older boys picked up an outdoor magazine that had a photo of a falconer with a goshawk. The article had the irresistible title of "Killers As Pets."

Over the next few years, every one of the brothers would try their hand at falconry, mostly Peregrines and Prairie Falcons. Don, at age 13 when that interest started, was no exception.

Don would stay in Southern California, become a police officer in the El Monte area, and raise a family of four kids. But he never lost his love of falconry.

He would fly his birds at various locations in the area including Whittier Narrows, Long Beach, Sepulveda Dam and a lot of the nearby airfields where there were plenty of jackrabbits, pheasants and other birds.

Like many falconers back in those years before the Internet, most practitioners had to create their own tools and accoutrements of the hobby. Don was good with crafts, for example, and he made beautiful hoods for his birds.

But it was in the early 1960s — when he started to build his own block perch — that really changed his role in the falconry world. In essence, this new endeavor would put his own name on a special pedestal.

His brother Dennis had a lathe in his garage and wanted Don to help him build a perch. Another friend also had a lathe that Don used. They used exotic woods and laminates, and it wasn't long before Don's work was noticed.

Falconer Hal Webster mentioned Don's exquisite craftsmanship in one of his books, and soon Don was getting orders from all over the world. What really set them apart were the ball bearings that allowed the block to swivel. His friend Bill Linde worked at a paper mill and would bring discarded ball bearings from the mill to Don's workshop for him to put into the perches.

"It revolutionized the block perch," Linde said. He still has one of the first blocks Don ever made. "They were amazing."

From the quality and design of the perches to the mention in Webster's book, Don was soon swamped with orders.

"Once he started making those perches, almost everyone wanted one, and he was too busy to fly," said his brother Dennis. "He was quite the craftsman."

He sold the perches for \$250, but it was really about the art and the love of doing it. Considering the time and care he put into his work, he certainly



Left: Gyrfalcon on a Don Grisco perch.

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wasn't making any money from the endeavor. Eventually, a nephew took it over, and though prices finally rose to \$500, it was still too much effort to keep up with the orders.

Today, those Don Grisco perches are still prized and often used as show blocks at falconry meets. They are treasured by those falconers lucky enough to have one.

Don was also treasured as a brother.

Dennis remembers a surprise visit from Don while living in one of those parts of Alaska that doesn't have addresses. Working in his garden under the midnight sun one evening at about 2 a.m., Dennis looked up to see his brother walking up the road. Don had gleaned hints of Dennis's exact whereabouts from his letters and paid him a surprise visit, greatly impressing his younger brother. Needless to say, while he was there, Don found a peregrine in its nest and took the bird back home with him.

Don also had an interest in deep-sea fishing, and his brother and friends can come up with fishing stories that include a 2,000-pound tuna or pushing their 12-foot stalled boat off boulders that turned out to be huge sea lions.

But it always came back to falconry for Don. It was a major part of his character.

"It's like being a cowboy," Linde said. "If you're a cowboy, you're a cowboy for life."

And Don was a falconer for life. He was good with those new to the sport and would take on apprentices. He had a good sense of humor and was always happy — willing to do anything he could for a person.

Don had the capacity for patience and dedication, which falconry demands so much. He had the will to do what he wanted and the ability to see things to completion. Falconry was just in his blood.

"We thought falconry was lucky to survive from the Middle Ages, and we were struggling to keep it alive for new generations," Linde said.

— Reminiscences: Dennis Grisco, Bill Linde, Bob McCallum

