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California Hawking Club, North American Falconers Association, Dan and Bev Fenske, Tamara Heineman, Frank Ely

# Remembering Michael

3/31/1940 - 3/25/2016

By Johni K., his daughter

## *This is the story of my Dad.*

He was born in Santa Monica, California.

His priorities were: Birds, Women, Music (Classic Rock) and Art in that order too.

He has/had 4 children: Me -his daughter Johni K, Michael Culver Smith Jr. (1/2/60 - 11/17/2015, died of heart disease) from his first marriage. Then from his second marriage: Kenneth Smith (died of heart disease) and Tamara Heinemann. He had 6 wives throughout his life. Marilyn was my and Micheal Jr's Mom. Roneen was Kenny and Tamara's Mom. Then there was Deanna, Maria, and finally Diane who he married when he was 69 I think. She left him when he got sick.



*Michael with Killer, a female barn owl in 1954.*

**Dad grew up with compassion for living things. His first bird was an owl he had found and took home. He named him "Killer" I have no idea why. That was when he was 14. He was in Jr. High. Well because it was in the local newspaper Disney saw it and asked if they could make a movie using his owl and a few others. The Movie was called "The Owl That Didn't Give A Hoot". It didn't come out till 1968.**

When he was 17 he started trapping birds in Semi Valley. He ended up keeping a small sparrow hawk and so was hooked. I went with him when I was a little girl. Often we'd find hurt birds like baby eagles and others. We bring them home. Dad raised them until they could fly. So I have seen many kinds of falcons.

I remember not getting many baths for a while as we always had baby eagles or some kind of babies in the bathtub. I called the fuzz balls. You outta see 4 fuzz balls in a bathtub. Pretty funny. Then they graduate to a play pen. Dad made all his own hoods, perches and barrel bathing tubs for the birds. We also had a few owls that were mine and my Moms. Eggburt and Molly had full run of the house.

Unfortunately Dad tied Eggburt in a mews with 2 other hawks and tied him to close to one of them. Eggburt got eaten! I was devastated. He was mine. I didn't speak to him for 4 days.

I was an animal lover too. Poor Dad, I brought everything home that could fly, run or crawl. Hurt of course! We nursed many back to health. He'd get mad at first but then again he was the one who taught me to respect animals and such. I told him it was his fault. He'd just grin.

**As time went on Dad started flying hawks more and more. I'd go with him as the years went on. Moffit field Air Force base in Calif. He had a bunch of birds then. Then he got Rosie. She was a peregrine falcon. She was gorgeous and won many flying heats. He had a small tiercel too. "Little Bit". He flew away one day and never came back. We looked for him for weeks.**



*Michael with red-tail in 1958.*

He claimed I was the best bush beater he had ever seen. I always could find the pheasants and rabbits even before the dog. Then we'd watch the birds in the air as they spotted the prey. Watching a bird soar and go after prey is a wonderful sight. It can't really be described. I even got my license to fly a bird too. It was like taking a driver's test back then. Then Dad had taught me how to drive. I was 10. 1958 Dodge Van. He had run to go get the bird wayyyyy other there when it landed!

Someone had to drive the van over to where he was, so he made blocks for my feet.

He co-owned a transmission shop Called B & M Transmission. I worked side by side with him when I could go with him and learned how to drop a tranny in a short period of time. I was a tomboy of course so it was fun for me. Him on the other hand.....he said I need to learn cars. Girls should know about cars that way we don't have to depend on anyone. I was a junior in high school by then. At school they wouldn't let girls go to car mechanic classes. I came home and told Dad they would not let girls attend. He marched down there with me in tow and had it out with the principal. All I know is that girls were allowed to attend after we left. Then Dad decided to switch gears after the transmission shop dissolved because his partner ran off with all the money. He got new job engineering for Atari.

**He was also going to school too. Most folks don't know he had 4 degrees in engineering and a degree in Law. He studied law not for people but to defend bird rights, people with birds rights and sanctioning a hawking club. He had to fight Fish and Game all the way.**

This was about the time he and his "cronies", as he called them, were starting a hawking club, the California Hawking Club. They'd all



*Michael with Rosie in 1972.*

jump in the Dodge Van and go "flying". There were a lot of hurdles to jump to get the club sanctioned, hence why Dad got his Law degree.

Dad even got the opportunity to go fly falcons with some Royalty in Iran.

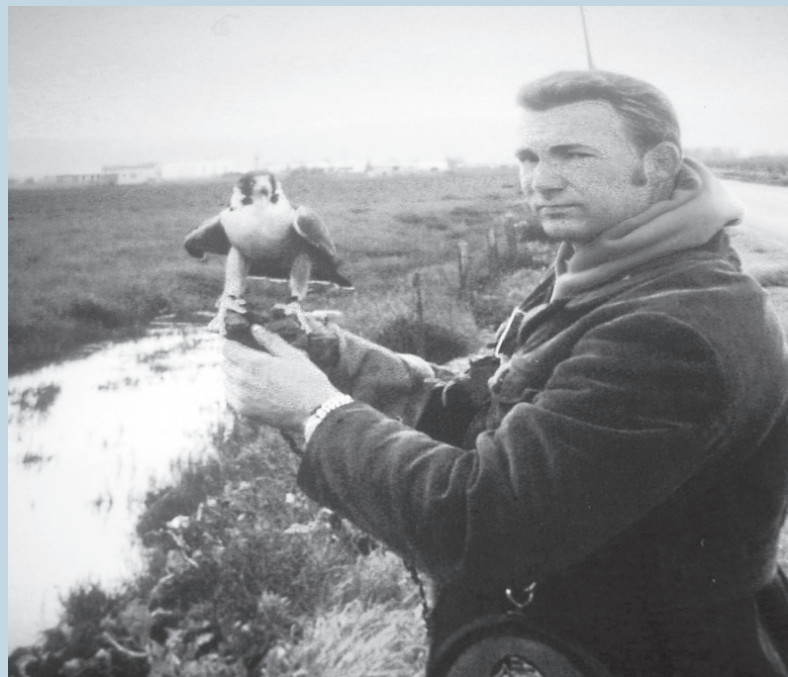
He had a friend of ours watch me while he was gone. Frank Hernandez. Dad was teaching him how to fly Red tail Hawks. Anyways, Dad had done business with this royalty person ( I don't remember his name). They became friends when Dad found out he was a falconer. The man sent plane to get Dad. Dad took Rosie to show them how it's done in America and vise a versea. Rosie did beautifully as always. They were impressed. What was real cool was, when Rosie landed with her prey, dad knelt down to sit with her and found a square ceramic tile half buried in the dirt. He brushed it off and it was a picture of a King on a horse with a falcon on his arm. What are those odds? He had that tile put in a sealed clear case to remember his great adventure by and to tell everyone the story of how he got it.

One time I was about 12, he had to fight the Fish and Game for another reason. We had just gone down to San Luis Obispo to a hatchery and bought 200 or so baby chicks as food for the hawks we had at the time. Protein. I think they were 3 or 4 for penny. I cried all the way there and back till he quit taking me. I was so against killing them for food.

What had happen when he had to fight the Fish and Game people was we had all the baby chicks locked in a pen in the back yard when we left to go to the store. When we came back from the store, traffic was stopped about the middle of our block. We got out of the car to see what was going on. All you could see was this big yellow mass of peeping chicks running down the street. Funnier than heck. My Dad tuned at looked at my brother and I because he didn't think it was that funny. Not me I said. My brother Michael had left the back gate open and they got out of the pen and then out of the yard. There were people, dogs, cats, and a ton of kids chasing them in all different directions.

When we finally made it to the house, Dad was instantly surrounded by MAD parents. Their kids wanted to keep the chicks and it was his fault. Then the department of Fish and Game came. I could see Dad having a heated agreement with them over it. I think Dad won because the Fish and Game guy slammed his car door shut when he left.

Dad and Deanna would put the baby chicks in plastic bags and then put them in the freezer. He would try to tell me they just lay down and



go to sleep. Nope, I wasn't buying it !! I had a temper tantrum every time. So beef heart started being the hawks food more and more after a while. We'd go see Bob Coleman then. He raised beef and flew hawks. Dad told Bob "Johni just has a fit all the time and the chickies weren't worth it."

Dad had many attributes. I was I guess 17 when he was a CEO at Atari by then. I worked there briefly till they found out I was his daughter. Policy. I tested Pong games on a TV all day. Loved it because I could watch "All My Children" on my lunch hour. Dad went all over the world doing business for them. He was getting help with the games from Bill Gates and Paul Allen in a garage. That's when Dad designed and engineered the Centipede Game. He won an award for it.

He also took his idea and engineer skills to Japan when he engineered the Teddy Ruxpin Bear under Atari. I still have the 3 prototypes. Of course we all know what happened - Teddy Ruxpin was born. Then he retired from them to start a new company.

**He partnered again and started a company called GRT Tapes. It was a recording studio. He loved music. His head for business got him famous clients. Rock bands and such. But I think he was proudest of his biggest client "Warner Brothers". He had a friend over there from working at Atari and asked if they were interested. Warner Brothers did all their movie music in his studio along with Warner Brothers label bands.**



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When he retired from there, he became a CEO recruiter with clients like HP, Raychem and other large companies. He did it from home so he had time for birds. Rosie had died of a foot infection after 8 years and Dad never recovered after that. He didn't get another bird either. He talked about it but never did.



Now he was monitoring the migration habits of birds down in Corpus Christi TX. Plus fighting for their rights. He loved the little sandpipers too. I also have pictures of him down at the ocean bank herding baby turtles. Yes, turtles. Every year he would

go help herd the babies into the water so they could up the population. I called him " the turtle herder". He loved doing it. I loved seeing him do it.

I moved him from TX to Oregon with me because of his health issues. He had Heart Disease all his life. I got the call from the hospital while I was at work. They told my boss he had 24 hours to live. I raced there and laid with him for hours trying to wake him up.

Then the weirdest thing happened while he was in the coma. When I finally realized I didn't want him to wake up and to suffer anymore, I whispered in his ear it was ok to go. I will be fine Daddy. His eyes popped right open and he looked right at me. He then took his last breath. And he was gone. He passed in that coma from COPD and heart disease. I laid with him till they told me they had to take him so the funeral place could come to get him.

His passion for hawks, women and living it up never died in him till he passed away that day.

***I think about him and miss him every day still. He was a wonderful man and I am very proud of him.***

