

## Artist

Ken was born on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1936, on the wind swept plains in Nome, North Dakota. He was raised on a farm and spent most of his boyhood in the great outdoors camping, fishing and hunting. He always had a passion for nature. His gentle spirit and calm demeanor made him a favorite companion to everyone, and all who met him loved and respected him. He received his basic art skills from Art Instruction Inc. and the Minneapolis School of Art. Much of his artwork deals with birds of prey, hawks, owls, and eagles.

He worked in the Art Department at General Mills for 42 years where he met his wife, Nancy. Ken and Nancy had four children: Tammy, Keith, Troy and Kurt.

Ken had an interest in falconry as a grade school youngster and Bob Widmeier was his mentor as he learned the sport. Ken held a Master Falconry Permit and trained and flew five different species of North American hawks throughout his falconry career; Kestrel, Red-tailed Hawk, Goshawk, Coopers Hawk and Peregrine Falcon. In all, he flew 18 of his own hawks from 1964-2001, keeping a handwritten notebook that included details about each of the birds, a hunting log, and notes about where he hunted.

He enjoyed falconry meets and was always flying his birds. During the hunting season his three oldest kids could be found tromping the brush for their dad in search of game. Following in her dad's footsteps, Tammy also became a licensed falconer and flew a Kestrel and a Red-tailed Hawk. Ken was an enthusiastic falconer all of his life. He was a member of North American Falconers Association and was a founding and Honorary member of the Minnesota Falconers Association.

Ken held a Master Banding Permit and for more than 30 years trapped and banded on Moose Mountain, north of Duluth. For many of these years, Tammy, who also held an associate banding permit, trapped, banded and sat in the blind with her dad. Whenever there was a lull in the action, they would get out the coffee and a sandwich and it was guaranteed to bring in a bird. One special time, it was their first peregrine falcon that came in just as he poured the coffee.

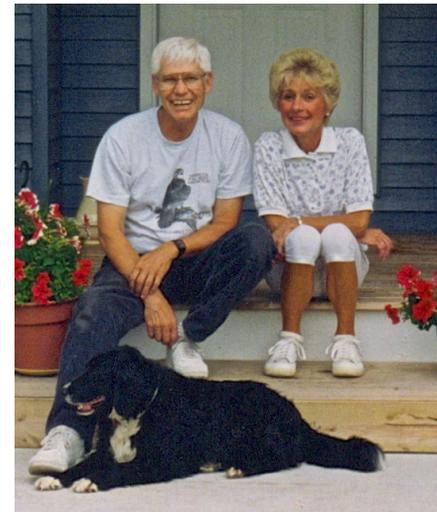


## Family Man

He raised homing pigeons where he lived in New Hope, Minnesota, in the 1970's. Keith and Tammy would ride off on their bikes, each with a couple pigeons, taking them further and further each time to train them to fly back home. The kids loved riding back as fast as they could to hear Ken announce whose bird had made it back first. Ken continued to raise pigeons until the last few years of his life.

Ken was skilled at leatherworking and made falconry equipment for himself and his fellow falconers. Hoods, bags, leashes and excellent falconry bells were his most sought after items. He also enjoyed archery and made many traditional bows and arrows. Family get-togethers often involved shooting at the various targets set up on his property.

Tammy Holmer (Ken's Daughter)



# Falconer



Remember years ago when Readers Digest had a monthly series called "My Most Unforgettable Character"? Well, for me, that person would be Ken Holkestad.

I first met Ken in 1974 when I was 23 years old and joined the newly formed Minnesota Falconers Association. I quickly discovered that Ken was the go-to person representing the club to new members. I had become a falconer as a junior in high school but had not practiced the sport since then because of joining the service, college and getting married. He immediately made me feel welcome!

As a new member, I was very honored to be invited to Ken and his charming wife Nancy's home just a few miles from me in New Hope, MN. They were so pleasant, cordial and friendly and it soon became apparent that Ken was extremely knowledgeable about falconry and raptors. From those first meetings through many wonderful years, he offered his opinions and views and helped me a great deal in many areas.

We were good friends for many decades, hunting together in the winter and playing golf in the summer. As a friend and mentor, he could be counted on to be supportive, even when things did not go quite as hoped. For example, when I had a breeding chamber at my home trying to breed Lanner falcons, Ken loved to come over on his lunch hour and peer through the peephole into the chamber and watch the Lanner pair in the early spring. He was a little disappointed, as I was, that the pair only produced infertile eggs but he was consistently positive, helpful, and encouraging of the attempt.

Ken was a gifted artist in multiple media and I and many other falconers particularly appreciated and used his leather falconry accessories and well-designed acorn style bells.

Ken will be greatly missed by me and all of the falconers here in Minnesota. What made him so special: he was welcoming and willing to share his wealth of experience and knowledge with all who were fortunate enough to meet him. And he was never arrogant or judgmental. He was a gracious and



great man, a PLEASURE to know! Thank you, Ken Holkestad!

A little hunting memory follows...

I went hunting with Ken many times but this one instance sticks in my mind. It was the end of January, about 1975, and a group of us went hunting with our birds down by the Mississippi River in South St. Paul. The snow that year was deep, about two feet, and some of the hunters wore snowshoes. Ken had brought Baron, his well-trained male Red-tailed Hawk. He posted Baron in a tree and a few of us started beating the brush and tramping around trying to get quarry moving. Well, a rooster pheasant exploded out of the snow in front of us and flew up about ten feet off the ground. We started



yelling, of course, and I looked up at Baron. He was calmly watching the whole event from the branch. The pheasant flew about 150 yards and landed behind a tree. And THAT'S when Baron moved. He flew over to where the pheasant landed and grabbed it there. No fuss, like it was no big deal, like he knew exactly what he was doing! Ken ran over and picked up Baron and the dead rooster. Easy as pie. Not the most spectacular flight I have ever seen, but so effective I have remembered it all of these years. Ken was a cool falconer!!!

Marc Rude

# Bird Bander

