



Leo Champagne

November 27, 1925 - June 3, 2020

FLORIDA-- Long time former Westbrook resident Leo Champagne passed away peacefully on June 3rd in The Villages, Florida.

Son of Frank & Rose (Audet) Champagne, Leo was born November 27, 1925 and raised in Westbrook, Maine. He attended Catholic schools through 8th grade and graduated from Westbrook High School where he was an outstanding student and lettered in 3 sports. He had two brothers, Raymond and Joseph and a sister Rita, all of whom predeceased him.

Sensing a duty to his country, Leo, only 17 years old at the time, enlisted in the US Marine Corp in the summer of 1943. During his 3 years in the Marines, he served as a Field Artillery Crewman in Battery D, 2nd Battalion, 13th Marine Regiment of the 5th Marine Division. The 5th Marines were part of the invasion forces for the Battle of Iwo Jima. After surviving the month-long battle of Iwo Jima, Leo returned with the 5th Marines to Camp Tarawa in Hawaii to train for the invasion of Japan. After the surrender of Japan, the 5th Marines sailed to the island of Kyushu Japan to serve as part of the occupying forces. When the 5th Marines left Japan in late 1945, Leo was transferred to the 3rd Battalion, 10th Marines Regiment and assigned to the 2nd Marine Division for further duty during the Occupation of Japan.

Leo was discharged as a Corporal from the Marines in May 1946 and returned to welcoming parents, family, and friends. Once rested and ready to return to civilian life, he went to work for S.D. Warren Company in the pulp mill. He was encouraged to take courses at the University of Maine in Orono which led to a promotion into management and a primary role on many projects, including the biomass power plant. He retired in 1985.

Leo married Beverly Barrows in 1948 and they raised 5 children. He built a camp on Little Sebago in the early 60's which provided many memorable summers of swimming, boating, board games, cookouts, and hikes into the woods. The family of seven would pile into the car the day after school got out and not return until the day before school began. The

annual trip to Old Orchard Beach was a summer highlight. In the autumn, Leo and friends would spend time at the camp hunting and enjoying friendly games of poker.

By turns mercurial and charismatic, Leo was a complicated man. His notorious frugality was likely a product of having been a child of the Great Depression. As a boy he hopped trucks to work the farming fields and found ways to have fun that cost nothing. Despite his frugality, as a young father, Leo invested in a movie camera which leaves behind years of priceless family footage of Christmas mornings and summers at the lake. He found a way to provide recreation on a minimal budget and the annual traditions he instituted created a wonderful rhythm year to year. Once a year he would peel many pounds of potatoes to make french fries and gave us permission to eat as many as we wanted.

Leo was exceedingly fond of routine. He loved Amato's Italian sandwiches, reading the daily newspaper, and listening to Nat King Cole. He was a lifelong Red Sox fan and as an adult played softball well into his 80's. God knows he was stubborn and continued jogging and playing ball long past when his knees said to stop. Leo was a big part of division 4 softball in The Villages and took part in all aspects of the league. He was a player, manager, coach, umpire, and board member. He managed and pitched for a championship team called the Suns in 2005-2006 season. Leo was honored for many years at the championship game. He was a good athlete and friend to many who played.

The ways that Leo was impacted by his time on Iwo Jima are unfathomable. He never talked about the horrors he witnessed until late in life when he joined a VA support group and learned there was a name for some of what troubled him: PTSD. He became a mentor for younger vets and went on to give well received talks about his experiences on Iwo Jima to many organizations including an address at The Missouri Military Academy. These talks, spanning a decade, became a form of therapy. Leo was invited to participate in The Veterans History Project of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress where his oral history is chronicled.

Leo spent the early years of his retirement living at Little Sebago Lake in the summer. He enjoyed a community of good friends, corn roasts, camp fire parties, afternoon card games and hosting family gatherings. These gatherings always included pepperoni, extra sharp cheddar, triscuits & sour pickles. Off season, he loved getting into his blue Ford truck to travel solo across the country. In later retirement, Leo enjoying basking under the never-ending sun in Florida. He and Beth Stern, his beloved female companion of many years, enjoyed dancing, traveling, attending concerts, playing tile rummy and listening to The Lawrence Welk show with Beth's mom Mary. He cherished his monthly dinners with

Marine buddies and appreciated the faithful care of friend Artie Hines. Fiercely independent, Leo lived on his own until age 93. His last two trips, one as a VIP on a tour of the capital and the other to The National WWII Museum in New Orleans were especially meaningful.

Leo was pre-deceased by his son, Kerry. He is survived by his daughters Rhonda Butterfield and her husband Tom of Gorham, Kathy Jensen and her husband Tim of Winslow, Susan Champagne and her partner Pam Hansen of Berkeley, California, and his son Greg Champagne of Florida. He is also survived by his many grand children and great grand children, nieces and nephews.

If so inspired, please remember Leo by offering an unexpected and unsolicited act of kindness for an unfortunate soul in his name. You may also remember him by listening to his favorite song: Stranger on the Shore. There will be a private graveside service later in the year.

Comments



“ Dear Cathy,
My deepest sympathies to you and your entire family on the loss of your Dad. It doesn't matter how old they are, it is so hard to lose our parents. It's also so difficult to put a person's life into words in just a few paragraphs, but his obituary was so beautifully written. You all shared all his accomplishments, and enjoyments so well, giving us all true insight into the life he led. What a wonderful man he was.
God bless you all.
Love, Lynn McClure

Lynn Nelson McClure - June 29 at 11:23 AM



“ I love you dad. Love, Rhonda

Rhonda Butterfield - June 29 at 06:53 AM



“ So many memories of you growing up. What an interesting and full life you have led.
Rest well.

Jeanne Lebel Niemiec - June 28 at 07:41 AM