



Railsplitter Obituary



Richard “Dick” Peterson

24 April 1942 – 21 April 2023

Richard “Dick” L. Peterson, 80, passed away April 21, 2023, following a short illness and a long, courageous battle with dementia.

Dick was born to Howard and Ruth (Zimmermann) Peterson in Burlington, WI on April 24, 1942. He proudly called Burlington home for the rest of his life.

On December 20, 1969, Dick married Elizabeth “Betty” K. Smith. While he maintained it was the only mistake she ever made, the two proved to be an unstoppable duo, raising four children in a home filled with love and the occasional grounding. After their children were grown and Dick and Betty were both retired, they traveled extensively and spent their summers on the beautiful north shore of West Battle Lake, MN. There, Dick spent a lot of time on his boat and a little time catching fish.

Dick earned his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from UW-Madison and was a Badger through and through, but most especially on Saturdays at Camp Randall.

Dick received a commission as Second Lieutenant from ROTC at UW-Madison. After reporting for active duty, he was sent to Germany where he served with a Hawk Missile Battery. Upon his release from active duty, Dick was assigned to the



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84th Division, a reserve unit headquartered in Milwaukee. Dick served for 22 years, retiring at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

Dick worked for the Burlington Area School District for 34 years. After a brief stint as a history teacher, he became an assistant principal at Burlington High School, a position he held until his retirement in 2001. Dick saw goodness and potential in every kid who walked through the doors of the high school and loved going to work every day.

Like his father before him and his brother after him, Dick was a member of the Burlington Fire Department. He served for 50 years, eventually becoming Deputy Fire Chief. The fire department was an important source of community and support for Dick and his family and has continued to be through these last years.

Dick was a WIAA baseball umpire for over 50 years. He apologizes for any bad calls. He was a longtime member of the board of Love, Inc. He was a life-long and active member of Plymouth Congregational UCC.

Dick is survived by his wife of 53 years, Betty, whom he adored every day of all those years. He is also survived by his four grateful children: his son Shane Peterson, of Boswell, OK; his daughter Stacie (Tom) Coleman of Burlington, WI; his son Neal Peterson of Biloxi, MS; and his daughter Sarah (Glen Pawelski) Peterson, of Madison, WI. He also leaves behind his two beloved grandsons, Jack and Bo Coleman, and his brother and friend James "Jim" (Laurie) Peterson, of Burlington, WI. Dick is further survived by his sister-in-law Evelyn Price of Williams Bay, WI; his brother-in-law Jerry (Sharon) Smith of Shingle Springs, CA; and numerous other relatives and friends, too many to name but treasured just the same.

Dick was preceded in death by his parents and his brother-in-law, Dennis "Tony" Price.

Dick's family would like to thank the following who cared for Dick and his family in equal measure: the staff at Aurora Lakeland Medical Center and Aurora Hospice for giving Dick the comfort he deserved and desperately sought the last days of his life; nurse Heidi from Aurora at Home; and Chad and Desteney from Touching Hearts at Home.