OBITUARY

Gary C. Ness

APRIL 8, 1940 – JUNE 27, 2026



IN THE CARE OF

Schoedinger Midtown

Gary Clifford Ness (1940 -2026) passed away in the presence of family and his third Newfoundland dog. A product of Sioux City Iowa, he lived as a student in Ames as well as Durham, North Carolina (Iowa State University and Duke University,) as a serviceman in Okinawa (US Army,) as a professor and administrator at the University of Cincinnati, and as a deft public servant / educator in his long career as the Director of the Ohio Historical Society in

Columbus, Ohio. His volunteering as the manager of the Iowa State wrestling team was a precursor to the engagement, flexibility and determination so evident in his professional life.

In lieu of any sadness, picture someone directing a bemused frown at a younger sister, large dog or errant golf swing; or writing a letter, celebrating an underdiagnosed pun, conscientious in filling each waffle square with both syrup and butter, muttering C'mon Gary as he's fishing with friends and family, immersing himself equally in historical documents and Scandinavian noir fiction, navigating over 30 years of vagaries in state government, listening earnestly to a blacksmith, and perhaps writing a book we've yet to discover in a home full of books. Manifesting the sweet heart of his Swedish mother, the responsible and unassuming nature of his Norwegian father, and buoyed by the joie de vivre so conspicuous in his sister Sharri and wife Heather.

Preceded by parents Cliff and Elsie Ness, sister Sharri, and in-laws Stark and June Humphreys, survived by sons Andrew, Josh and John, daughters-in-law Toni, Cathy and Nicole, grandchildren Alexander, Laurel, Sam, Linnea, Elsie and Jillian, and nieces and nephews Erin, Tim, Michael, Cory, Rachel and Melanie, and by beloved wife and partner Heather. Gary and Heather celebrated their 62nd-and-a-half anniversary last week! Their lives combined a joy in one another, sustained service in public education and history, travel (among continents and living overseas, but more often of the 12-hour car ride variety), devotion to their family, and an enthusiasm for college basketball and the Cincinnati Bengals. In addition, Gary's sustained participation in Kit Kat, Columbus Rotary, the Michigan North Woods Club, his brotherhood with Phi Delta, and the annual WPO celebration of golf and friendship provided decades of inquiry, exploration and joy. Gary loved thoughtful discussion but nonetheless considered the superiority of pork tenderloin, chocolate malts, and rhubarb to be settled issues.

Although Gary's death was caused by conditions associated with thyroid cancer, he survived more than 50 years after the original diagnosis and treatment. He was grateful to the personnel of Duke Hospital and The James Cancer Hospital for keeping so many of the aforementioned accomplishments and joys within his reach. In his last weeks, Gary's "closing arguments" often focused on encouraging those around him to recognize their capacity to effect positive change in the world, particularly in relation to protecting public health, nature, and freedom of the press.

In lieu of flowers, the family invites memorial contributions in Gary's honor to the Gary and Heather Ness Endowment at the Ohio History Connection. Through this endowment, Gary's legacy will help ensure that Ohio's stories, places and collections continue to inspire and educate future generations. Gifts may be mailed to: Ohio History Connection (Attn: Development Office), 800 E. 17th Avenue, Columbus, OH 43211. Please note "Gary and Heather Ness Endowment" in the memo line or gift designation.

A memorial celebration and reception will be held at Ohio Village, which sits in the heart of the Ohio History Center where Gary worked for over 20 years. Ohio Village has been undergoing renovations and has not been open to the public for years, and the Ness family would like to express its profound thanks to the Ohio History for letting us celebrate Gary's life in a place that meant so much to him.

You can find a guide to the new revitalized (and soon to re-open) Ohio Village here: https://www.ohiohistory.org/visit/ohio-village/

Gary's Kit Kat Essays:

• State(s) of Mind (what makes Ohio "Ohio")

• Since the Beginning (reflections on Kit Kat Club)

• A Defining Moment? (the city of Columbus on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of its namesake's voyage) (October 1991)

• Precedents, Parallels, and Polls (on the presidential election of 1992) (November 1992)

• de Tocqueville Revisited (January 2005)

• Old News (November 2008)

• But For Ohio...? (January 2015)

That Young Lieutenant (April 2021)

Philosophy, Values, Dreams:
To contribute constructively to the enrichment and enjoyment of life by others, while pursuing the interest I find attractive with the abilities I have been given.