



Kenneth Earl Mason

May 4, 1945 - July 1, 2016

Kenneth Earl Mason, age 71, died peacefully after a long and full life on Friday, July 1, 2016.

Ken was born in Houston, Texas in 1945, to Edgar "Dick" Mason and Lois Opal (Wright) Mason.

As a boy, Kenny enjoyed the life of a city kid living in rapidly industrializing mid-century Houston while finding time for outdoor pursuits of rural Texas with his childhood mentors, Mr. and Mrs. Hill. Half "country boy" and half "city boy," that duality of outdoor interests and an urban life with his family enriched and characterized his entire life.

As a young outdoorsman, Ken had learned more about the wildlife and plants of the Texas Hill Country and the Gulf Coast, before reaching adolescence, than many natives of those regions learn in a lifetime. The abiding love of the outdoors would become a dominant theme of his own life that he would consistently share with his family.

By the time that he graduated from Houston's Jefferson Davis High School, he would already have worked a variety of jobs that gave him a keen respect for the dignity of all labor, including deck work on a shrimp boat in the Gulf of Mexico. A penchant for hard work allowed him to enjoy hard jobs.

Before long, however, the same natural aptitude for mechanical problems that had enabled the "city boy" to race cars with engines that he had personally built from parts brought him the opportunity to work in a series of positions on a metal fabrication line. Kenneth had a natural understanding of and curiosity about machines and the way that the parts of physical devices interact. His taste for hard work and long hours allowed him to quickly learn new skills on the shop floor.

His talent in solving the problems of machines, however, was rapidly overshadowed by his insight for concrete numbers, his facility with logistical problems, and his keen understanding of people.

Before many years had passed in the factory floor, he was called into the office, moving from roles that started as logistical and operations management to purchasing of steel and the management of people. Kenny, as a result of incredibly hard work throughout his career, lived the increasingly rare story of a factory floor worker who grew into a manager and rose to the board of directors at Engineered Components Incorporated (ECI), a privately-held company headquartered in Stafford with 500 employees in a dozen locations spread across the United States. All the while, he cared about and cultivated the intense loyalty of the people who worked with and for him over the decades.

Also before graduating high school, Ken began dating Barbara Leonetti, whom he would marry on March 25, 1966. Of all the good decisions of a life well-lived, he considered this to be the most important. In the course of a fifty-year marriage, Kenny and Barbara raised two sons, Mark and Stephen, who in their turn rewarded them for the effort with six grandchildren. Just as his career seemed to be a throwback to an earlier generation's ideal, his lifelong marriage to Barbara and his role as a dedicated husband and father were

those of the stereotypical "strong family man" of a bygone era.

From Mark's birth in 1968 to Stephen's graduation from Texas A&M in 1999, the unflinching support of his wife and children was the primary aim of his life. Just as he worked diligently to support his family, Kenny motivated both of his sons to approach their education with serious diligence and to apply themselves vigorously to serious studies. He was a hard-working and attentive father, and Barbara took naturally to the day-to-day tasks of checking homework and driving the boys from choir rehearsal to soccer practice. Together, they built a life for their sons that taught character by example and built opportunity through consistent support.

Both boys graduated from engineering school, having learned from their father's example the value of hard work and reverence for the connection between the world of mathematical figures and the world of embodied devices and structures. Kenny had taken time with both boys to show them "how numbers mattered," and to stop along the roadside to explain machines and the construction of structures that most people passed by without seeing, much less understanding. He even took the time to join his sons on a tour of a steel mill that he had arranged for their benefit.

Kenny also shared with his family the love of the outdoors. He had grown up camping on the beaches of Galveston while wade-fishing at San Luis Pass with his father. He had ridden horses and spent time on the farm in the summers with his father's people in Tennessee, and he had spent a significant part of his childhood wandering the Texas Hill Country on the ranch of one his parents' neighbors, learning the animals and plants of harder country with less water and more thorns.

As a teenager, he took up camping in the Hill Country with Barbara and her

parents, Allene and Frank Leonetti. When his boys were born, the family camped at Wimberley, and he taught his sons to swim in the clean Hill Country streams around Austin. He loved hunting deer with father-in-law, Frank, in East Texas.

He invested countless hours in ensuring that both his boys acquire a disciplined proficiency with firearms, that they understand the habits of the game animals that lived in the woods and streams of Texas, and that they cultivate in themselves a conservationist's reverence for nature. He taught his sons about environmentalism by telling them, simply, that, "you eat what the deer and the fish eat, if you're patient enough." He wandered with them to pick grapes and berries and dig wild garlic, when the opportunity arose. He made them draw water out of a well with a hand-crank. He taught them to grind and stuff sausage the old-fashioned way – by hand.

In addition to hunting deer in the rocks as a boy, he shared his passion for the outdoors with his father-in-law, Frank Leonetti (and many of Frank's friends), throughout the 1970s in East Texas. Sometime in the late 1970s or early 1980s, he developed a taste for dove and quail hunting in South Texas with colleagues from ECI.

His enduring outdoor passion, though, was for the rifle, and his (frequently unbelievable) marksmanship with rifles gave him a peculiar talent for shooting things that other people were unable to see. In time, that passion for rifles would turn his attention to hunting African plains game in the Texas Hill Country and the Rio Grande Valley in the 1990s and would return him to hunting the hogs and deer of East Texas in the 2000s. He also fished occasionally, including freshwater fishing in Canada and saltwater fishing with his boys in the Gulf of Mexico in the 1990s.

Over time, his passion for hunting gave rise to a passion for cooking. He

understood food better than many professional chefs, having carried dinner from the field all of his life. He acquired a stout shelf of cookbooks, constantly watched cooking shows in an ongoing search for new cooking ideas that he would try on family and friends. "Papa Bear" (as his grandchildren would call him) rose before anyone else in the house to make sure that complex breakfasts were prepared at the moment that his young eaters were ready.

As late as the summer of 2013, he was still wade fishing off the west end of Galveston Island and cooking his notoriously extravagant omelets with mango salsa for his family. Shortly before retiring in 2015, he was scanning the cliffs for goats in the Wasatch National Forest with Barbara, Stephen, and Stephen's wife and daughters. Shortly after retiring, he drove with Stephen to Hoover Dam, both to see the desert and to study one of the great machines of the 20th century. Ken was an avid coin collector, and was still working with Mark on expanding his ever-growing collection just weeks before his passing.

He is survived by his wife of fifty years, Barbara Mason, their two sons, Mark Mason and Stephen Mason, their wives Paula and Diane, respectively. His six loving grandchildren, Alley, Pamela, Zachary, Eleanora, Morgan and Mary Margaret will always remember their kind, loving grandfather as "Papa Bear," a name that just seemed to fit. Ken is also survived by his mother, Lois Mason, his brother Donald Mason, his sister, Sandra MacTavish and many nieces, nephews, extended family and friends. He was preceded in death by his father, Edgar "Dick" Mason.

Services will be held at 3:00 PM on Saturday, July 9th at Covenant Church, 4949 Caroline Street, in Houston. A brief reception will follow.

For more information about Ken's rich life, donating to the American Cancer Society in lieu of flowers, pictures and remembrances, visit KennethEarlMason.com (this website).