



## Donald L Stetson

December 22, 1934 - October 14, 2018

STETSON, Donald L. 83, of Tucson died Sunday, October 14, 2018. Don is survived by Shirley, his loving wife of 61 years. He is also the devoted father of Patty (Mike Baker) Sams, Janet (Dale) Curtis and Diana Coleman. He is the cherished grandfather of James Daniel Sams, Matthew Donald Sams and Kimberly Stetson Harman. Along with his great grandchildren Anderson and Addison Harman, Sophie Sams, and arriving in January of 2019, Genevieve Sams. Don was employed with Central Alarm of Tucson for over 58 years. He proudly served our country in the US Army from 1955 – 1963.

Don was born on December 22, 1934 in the booming metropolis of Mina New York (pop 1,062) to Florence and Leo Stetson. Don spent his early years with his grandparents, Gilbert Sr. and Velma Stetson. Ma and Pa to the family. Don and Gilbert were more like brothers than nephew and uncle having only nine years separating them. Their school was in Sherman NY. They don't say much about being bussed to school but they have plenty to say about their long walks home after getting kicked off the bus. They still find those stories funny.

During Don's school years, Pa was a dairy farmer in Northeast PA. Don has many stories about the farm such as when he and Gilbert Jr would milk the cows in the morning before heading off to school. They had an Australian Shepard dog they used to round up the cows on those cold, early mornings. Don remembered how they would swing open the door of the barn at 3:30 in the morning, then send the dog out in the dark. A few minutes later, he could hear the barking dog in the dark as it rounded up and herded the cows into the barn to be milked.

Don wasn't raised by his parents and spent little time with them, none with his mother. He was dropped off at Pa's when he was just two months old. When we would ask why, he would usually avoid the subject by answering with his good memories of Ma and Pa and especially Gilbert Jr. Don had the greatest admiration and respect for all of them. When Don and Shirley would take their young family "back home" on vacation, his kids knew Don's "family" as Ma, Pa, and Gilbert along with Gilbert's wife Ruth and their three children

Steve, Joyce and Jeff.

After Gilbert married Ruth, Don's summers were spent on Gilbert's farm in Ripley, NY. Gilbert grew grapes for Welches as did most of the surrounding farms. The area is on the shores of Lake Erie and included the towns of Erie and Northeast, PA along with Ripley, NY. Grape farming was a tough, hard and often freezing cold business back then. Not only was the planting, care and protection of the vines a tough deed, the harvest was a 24/7 operation. Add to that, the farmer had to wait seven years to be paid for that crop! Many of the Stetson family worked at Welches processing plants.

Don graduated from high school in 1954. Economic times were tough then. He couldn't find solid work, so like many young American boys did he enlisted in the US Army in 1955. His MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) was RADAR and he was attached to the Signal Corps. This is the genesis of his lifelong work with microelectronics. The history of the Signal Corps is fascinating, if one takes the time to read about it. Don joined during the Korean War. This was right at the time the Signal Corps mobile wireless radar communication was being implemented across the battle field. Prior to the Korean War, wired telephones had to be strung across the battle field in order to exchange critical information between commanders and troops. Prior to radar, the enemy could cut the wire that severed all communications. Radio transmissions by radar and mobile satellites were not susceptible to simply cutting a wire. The enemy had to find the satellite or radar installation and destroy it to interrupt communications. Don's service years were during some of the most significant technological changes in Signal Corps history. Signal Corps soldiers were some of the most vital and safeguarded soldiers in the Army at the time. Even today, high speed communications and intelligence remain at the forefront of all branches of the military and now, other government agencies tasked with defending our country.

Don's MOS during this time was extremely sensitive to our country because of the US Signal Corps soldier's knowledge and the technology was urgently sought by our enemies. Don's MOS required him to stay in constant contact with his commanders and if on the road, the Pentagon, updating his whereabouts daily. His MOS required him to remain in inactive duty status for five additional years after his three years of active duty service in 1958. Even today, high speed communications and intelligence remain at the forefront of all branches of the military and now, Don was proud to be attached to the Signal Corps, and we are proud of him.

Don was stationed at Ft. Huachuca during the end of his active service. On leave, soldiers from Ft. Huachuca routinely went to Tucson to engage in the age old pursuit of female

company. This activity is usually disguised by men under the façade of dancing. Dancing in bars. We are sure he didn't meet his Shirley in a bar. She just wouldn't have been there. We know it. But somehow, somewhere, Don met Shirley Harrison, the third of four daughters of Frank and Genevieve Harrison in the summer of 1956. Don and Shirley were married in Northeast PA on January 2nd, 1957. They returned to Tucson and Ft. Huachuca in their brand new 1957 Chevy he bought in Buffalo NY. Anyone that knows Don can imagine how he must have treated that new car. After Don's honorable discharge in 1958, he and Shirley went back to Northeast, PA where he was able to find a work. In early September of 1958, their eldest daughter Patricia was born. During that winter, Don was on his way to work and hit a patch of ice. His new car spun a few circles. Although nothing was damaged, Don decided that very instant that the icy winters of Northeast, PA was not for him and his new family. They packed up and moved to Tucson where the weather was much milder. I'm sure his young wife didn't put up much resistance; growing up in Minnesota.

Once back in Tucson, Don found work re-capping tires. A terrible hot, backbreaking and dirty job. Later, he worked at Hopper Truck Lines with his brother in law, the late Don Dowers. Somewhere along the line, Don Dowers met Lee Underdown, the owner of Central Alarm and asked Lee if he needed help. Don Dowers told Lee about brother in law's military experience. Don Stetson then went to work for Central Alarm in January of 1960. In March of 1960, Don's second daughter Janet was born; or one could say, another Central Alarm employee was born. Security systems were complex things back then. Very complex. Don's experience in mobile, microelectronics from the Army instantly made him a knowledgeable and valued installer at Central Alarm. Mr. Underdown (Lee) and Don worked together for several years installing increasingly sophisticated systems around Tucson for residential, commercial and industrial buildings. These systems were complicated because a ton of micro switches and contacts had to close in a particular order at the alarm in order for the signal to transmit to the Central Station. Those signals traveled across regular telephone lines.

On the Central Station end, operators interpreted the signals and would call the police, give them the address and the type of sensor, and later, the zone that tripped. As alarms became more sophisticated, and Central Alarm became more capable, the customers wanted more; they wanted more than a front or back door "protected". Customers wanted windows, roof penetrations where AC units or coolers were located and service ladders included in their protection. Along with motion detectors, fire alarms, heat detectors, refrigerator shutdown alerts and an array of other sensors had to be designed and built from scratch, on site, by installers like Don. He was the lead designer/installer in the 60's and 70's.

As the company grew, specifically the Central Station, operators were hired to monitor incoming signals. One of those operators was June Dowers, Shirley's sister and Don Dowers' wife. June eventually trained Janet when she went to work there after graduating from high school at 18.

Don's other role was alarm service. He was on call 24/7 for alarm repairs. Don and Shirley both recalled many times when Don was called in the middle of the night. They would load up their two young daughters and while his family slept in the truck, he would repair the system. Usually after a break-in had damaged it. Back then, Police really appreciated and respected what alarms did and what Central Alarm could do to help them catch the bad guys. Many times, they alarm helped the police catch them in the building, red handed.

Don told of times that a burglar would trip a silent alarm, the police would "surround the place" and catch him. On some occasions, catch him on the roof. On some of those occasions, the shortest distance to the police car was a push off the roof. Don would say "that took some of the fight out of 'em."

Don and his family's relationship with the Underdown family is a story all by itself. Don was employed by Central Alarm for 58 years. A few years after being hired at Central Alarm, Don and Shirley were able to purchase their first home. This purchase came just in time to welcome their youngest daughter Diana in March of 1967. Janet also worked for Central Alarm as an operator, starting with her Aunt June the day after high school graduation and retiring after 37 years as the Central Station Manager. For Janet, this is will always be one of the most memorable times of her life. Being able to work with, and talk to her father nearly every day for 37 years. It was usually the center of most family conversations at every family gathering. Patty and Diana probably know as much about the history of Central Alarm as many of the longtime employees there. Central Alarm has a truly remarkable legacy of long term employees. With the exception of Gary Underdown, I don't think there is any one that has worked there longer than Don...yet.

Lee and Dorothy Underdown's son Gary and daughter JoAnn Miller own Central Alarm now. They both know and treated Don like family. JoAnn's son Richard (Dickie Lee) the General Manager, and Missy his sister were raised around Don and his family. Don was as much an uncle as he was an employee to Dickie and Missy. They, along with several exceptional and interesting fellow employees, have played a big part of Don's life, and he theirs. There are a core group of people, some still working there, some that have moved on, but still stay in contact. People that really are uniquely associated like an extended

family. Lee and Dorothy Underdown would be proud of what they started. Don, and his family were certainly proud he worked there.

Don and Shirley had many friends through the years. Some of his closest were his family. Gilbert and Ruth moved to Tucson in the early 80's and their children followed them. Don and June Dowers, along with their kids, and their spouses are some of Don's closest friends. The Dowers and Stetson families shared every birthday of every person for decades until the families just got too large. Don's nieces and nephews, Jeanie Gallman, Mike Dowers, Carol Chamberlain, and Jeff Stetson all reflect often of the times they spent with Uncle Don and Aunt Shirley.

Don's three grandkids are a very big part of Don and Shirley's life. They were as committed to the wellbeing of those kids and any parent has ever been. Anyone who witnessed their determination to care for those three kids will always be astounded. JD, Matt and Kimmy spent much of their young life at Don and Shirley's house in Tucson or their cabin in Pinetop, AZ.

No story of Don's life would be complete without including Don and Shirley's close friends, Lenny and Beverly Byrd. They both have helped Don build his cabin in Pinetop, and many other projects thru their 35 year friendship. The two coupled shared many of the family memories throughout the years including birthdays and parties, cruises and other trips in and out of the country. They both helped the family immensely during Don's final days at home and their support will never be forgotten by any of his family.

In spite of Don's childhood, one where he never knew his mother even though she lived in the same town, had a father who was rarely in his life, and was delivered a great deal of physical punishment for little or no reason, Don turned out to be an extraordinary husband, father and friend. This is confirmed by one indisputable fact; his daughters visited their mom and dad after work almost every day for the last 40 plus years! And they still do! Almost every single day. What a testament to great parenthood. Children so connected, so loved by their parents, that it's a daily ritual for them to visit their parents well into adulthood.

Don's life is a testament to no matter how hard you start in life, what choices you make when you are old enough to make them, is the only thing that will ultimately matter in the end.



# Comments

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“ Dad, I am missing you every day! Love you, Janet

janet curtis - January 15, 2019 at 10:24 PM

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“ Moore, Pluhowsky, Niederberger and Hawk families. purchased the Sentiments of Serenity Spray for the family of Donald L Stetson.



Moore, Pluhowsky, Niederberger and Hawk families. - October 25, 2018 at 03:15 PM

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“ Moore, Pluhowsky, Niederberger and Hawk Families purchased the Peaceful White Lilies Basket for the family of Donald L Stetson.



Moore, Pluhowsky, Niederberger and Hawk Families - October 25, 2018 at 03:11 PM

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“ Over 23 years ago I landed a project updating the security system for Luke Air Force Base in Phoenix Arizona  
Gary Underdown asked me who I wanted to work with me on the project  
I asked him if I could take the longest term employee in the newest employee so I could learn from each of them.  
I was blessed to work with Dickie Lee Miller and Don Stetson. The three of us got along incredibly and have a great time finishing the project faster than scheduled. Our client was so happy with what we had done they asked us to do Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico as well I will always have amazing memories working with Don. Don always made sure The work was done perfectly the first time I don't think I ever went back and had to fax anything he had done I'm grateful I was able to get by and see him just a few weeks before his passing He looked great but said he was done fighting the fight. I will forever cherish that time I had with Don, Shirley and Janet. Don you are truly missed.

Derric Roof - October 23, 2018 at 11:38 PM

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“ My Uncle Don was and will always be a significant part and have a special place in my heart! I think about all the times I spent the nights at there home with my cousins Patty and Janet they were like my sisters more than cousins and Uncle Don and Aunt Shirley always made me fell that way when I was there. I loved our trips to Apache lake(hated the road to get there!) Uncle Don taught us to water ski behind the red fish boat! Also going fishing at Big lake is where I found my love to fish. Our families where truly bonded and the memories are endless. My Uncle Don had a special bond with my husband Dave and they loved to see each other and talk. My heart is broke but I know he is in heaven with my dad and brother all Don's enjoying it with each other and all the other relatives and friends whom have passed before! I love you Uncle Don I will see you again in heaven!

Carol Chamberlain - October 21, 2018 at 06:14 PM

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“ 9 files added to the album Memories Album



Evergreen Mortuary, Cemetery & Crematory - October 21, 2018 at 10:32 AM

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“ Don was a man who literally “worked all his life”. Rejected at birth, he worked with the animals and in the fields daily during his early years. He worked through high school and still found a way to participate in sports. He served honorably in the Army, married, and had a beautiful family.

He worked 58 years at a job he loved.

At home, in the evenings and on weekends, he worked to make sure his cars, homes and yards were meticulously maintained. His pride in his family and personal accomplishments were obvious to all who knew him.

He worked to find time to hunt, fish, camp, water-ski, travel, raise grandkids and spend time with friends. He loved the White Mountains!

He worked his hardest to defeat the cancer that took his life. We're confident he's finally enjoying the retirement he deserves from a life well lived.

We cannot replace him in our lives but we'll work harder now trying to live up to his example.

Love Always,  
Bev and Lenny

**Bev and Len Byrd** - October 21, 2018 at 07:27 AM