



Hugh McCann

March 28, 1928 - June 13, 2014

INTERLOCHEN, MI – Hugh Wray McCann, 86, retired science editor for The Detroit News, passed away peacefully on June 13, 2014 surrounded by his loving family. McCann was born a twin March 28, 1928 in Kilkeel, County Down, Northern Ireland, though his brother Charles died of pneumonia at the age of one. McCann was the oldest son in a family that would eventually grow to 11 children.

As a child, he was an altar boy at St. Colman's Church-Massforth and attended St. Colman's Dunavan Primary School in Kilkeel. He completed his secondary education at St. Colman's College, then an all-boys Catholic boarding school, at Violet Hill, Newry. While attending Queen's University in Belfast, he joined the Officers Training Corps, Royal Irish Fusiliers.

Originally McCann attended Queen's to begin the long course to a medical doctorate, as it had always been the plan that he would carry on his father's medical practice. Dr. Hugh Wray-McCann, however, passed away when McCann was 16 years old. In the end, McCann opted out of medical school to instead pursue a career in engineering. The degree would be quicker to achieve and allow him all the sooner to help support his widowed mother and eight younger siblings still at home.

In post-war 1940s, the few jobs available were being filled by returning troops. In search of better opportunity, McCann he left for Johannesburg, South Africa. There he found employment as a draftsman with a gold mining company.

A new friend there belonged to a band, and soon McCann joined as a vocalist. He learned to play the clarinet and saxophone, fulfilling a dream born of hours listening to swing band recordings he'd been introduced to by U.S. Army personnel stationed in Kilkeel to prepare for the WWII Invasion of Normandy.

Five years later, in 1951, McCann got passage on the RMS Queen Mary, heading to the United States. He stayed in Three Rivers, MI with his older sister, Anne, who'd married Bob Rice, one of the U.S. soldiers who'd been in Kilkeel. He found work as a draftsman in the Detroit area and moved to Royal Oak, MI, where he would meet his future wife Beverly Reid.

McCann sent funds home to his mother and put money aside to fund his goal of an engineering degree. However, the Korean War interrupted his plans. He was drafted into

the U.S. Army, trained and sent to Korea for two years. There he became a U.S. citizen, and his surname was changed from Wray-McCann to McCann with Wray as a middle name.

It was during his service that he wrote a letter to Mamie Eisenhower: Military personnel were allowed to send some of their pay, matched by a government allowance, home to parents or spouses, but McCann was denied sending money to his widowed mother either because she was not a U.S. citizen or she did not live in the U.S. Apparently Mrs. Eisenhower took the matter to heart, because a few months later McCann's mother received a considerable check, constituting back pay, followed by a regular stipend during the remainder of his service.

He used the GI Bill to first study engineering at Indiana Technical School of Engineering in Fort Wayne, IN. Although he steadfastly maintained that Irish men didn't even consider marriage until the age of 40, he finished his last semester with a wife, who understood when he confessed his real wish was to be a writer.

McCann took his bride to Ann Arbor, MI. There he attended the University of Michigan for a master's in journalism, with graduate certification in mathematics, anthropology and Russian studies. McCann's fine tenor voice earned him a spot with the University of Michigan Mens' Glee Club. He loved swing and jazz, and enjoyed playing the clarinet, saxophone, flute, piano and guitar.

While at full-time student at U of M, McCann worked part time with a team of engineers to develop the Bubble Chamber, a subatomic particle detector invented by Dr. Donald Glaser in 1952, for which Glaser won 1960 Nobel Prize in Physics.

McCann became a correspondent for Newsweek magazine's Detroit Bureau and moved his wife and two young daughters, Karey and Eileen, from Ann Arbor to Royal Oak, MI in 1962. Over the years, their household grew to include son Damien, daughter Maureen and finally son Christopher. The family spent three weeks every August camping at Indian Lake State Park in Michigan's upper peninsula, or at Miami Beach Campground at the top of Lake Michigan, both near Beverly's home town Manistique.

He joined the Detroit Free Press in the mid-1960s and was a member of the paper's editorial staff that won the Pulitzer for its coverage of the Detroit Race Riots of 1967.

McCann also scripted WXYZ-TV's Emmy-winning "Six Days in July" that chronicled the riots.

McCann's first novel, *Utmost Fish* (Simon & Schuster), was based on a then-still-classified World War I naval action in Central Africa. The book was published in the U.S. in 1965 and later in four European countries, and it remains a favorite among war-history buffs.

McCann left the Free Press in the mid-1970s to join *The Detroit News*, where he wrote as science editor until his retirement in 1997. McCann began his retirement by finishing a log house he and his wife built in Interlochen, MI. In 2002, his sons joined him for a family reunion in Australia, home to most of his siblings. Other siblings who attended came from

the United Kingdom, Canada and the U.S.

McCann and his longtime friend and colleague David C. Smith, editorial director emeritus of Ward's Auto World and Ward's Communications, began research for their novel *The Search for Johnny Nicholas* in 1968. Mystery surrounds Nicholas, a political prisoner of the Nazis, whose humanitarian efforts while detained in Camp Dora saved or prolonged the lives of numerous fellow prisoners. First published in the United Kingdom in 1982 (Sphere Books Ltd.), unanswered questions about Nicholas continued to intrigue McCann and Smith. Their ongoing investigation resulted in a revised edition published in 2011 (Arbor Cove Press).

In 2002, McCann suffered a stroke, which robbed the great storyteller of his ability to communicate. He'd been working on the third draft of *Up Binnian*, a memoir of his childhood days in Kilkeel, where U.S. Army troops were stationed and the site of Greencastle Air Base during World War II. (The work is being continued by his journalist daughters, Karey McCann-Goode and Eileen Ganter.) For over a decade, his youngest daughter, Maureen, devoted several months a year to his care. She helped her mother maintain his hope, dignity and joy.

He was enthusiastic about his profession as a science writer. Among his favorite assignments were interviews with Jacques Yves Cousteau, Sylvia Earle and Dr. Lewis Leakey, as well as his ongoing coverage of the NASA space shuttle program.

McCann's brilliance was matched by an incredible sense of humor. He often imitated the routines of Danny Kaye, who he resembled and admired.

He loved Big Band music and jazz, clever conversation, science, writing, history – especially that pertaining to WWI and WWII – reading and carpentry. Perhaps McCann's finest attributes were his wit and generosity of spirit. He took a delighted interest in everyone he knew and met, making each person feel uniquely valued.

He was a true gentleman who embodied journalistic ethics, healthy skepticism and boundless curiosity, and passed on those traits to his children. He willingly shared his vast knowledge with others, eager to illuminate anyone who wished to listen. It was the passion of this most humble intellectual.

Years ago, McCann penned, in his classic meticulous script, ponderings of his purpose on the planet:

“The inputs that were made in my life, as I was growing up in Ireland, continue to cause me to ask myself how usefully I have spent my life.

As a journalist, I have not amounted to a great deal in terms of how the world judges these things. But I used to console myself with the thought that, as a journalist, I was filling the dual role of educator and historian.

Two, perhaps three, times a week in 30 column inches, I was teaching someone to better understand some aspect of science. And, too, in so doing, I was recording a tiny installment of human scientific progress, telling it a day at a time.

I feel better being thought of as an educator/historian. I feel that my life is easier to defend when couched in those terms. When it comes my turn at the Pearly Gates, that's how I plan to identify myself."

McCann is predeceased by his parents, Dr. Hugh Wray-McCann and Anne Elizabeth Harvey Wray-McCann; his brothers Charles and James; nephews Shane Wray-McCann and Robin Reid; and most recently his daughter Maureen McCann (Peter Sorrell). He is survived by his loving wife of 58 years, Beverly Reid McCann; daughters Karey McCann-Goode (Alan Goode) and Eileen Ganter (Carl); sons Damien (Isabel) and Christopher McCann; granddaughters Anne Raona, Colleen Raona Sernick (Dennis), Kira Ganter and Eva McCann; grandsons Brandon Raona and Ian McCann; and great granddaughters Lucia and Corina Sernick. He is also survived by his brothers Peter, John, Carl and Frank Wray-McCann; and sisters Anne Rice, Pauline O'Callaghan, Jaqueline Richards and Mary Myall; and many loving nieces and nephews.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Munson Hospice House, 450 Brook St., Traverse City, MI 49684-2386; The Interlochen Jazz Ensemble, Interlochen Center for the Arts; 4000 Hwy M-137, Interlochen, MI 49643; The University of Michigan Mens' Glee Club, P.O. Box 4037, Ann Arbor, MI 48106; St. Colman's College, Vioet Hill, 46 Armagh Road, Newry BT35 6PP, N. Ireland; or St. Colman's Church, Massforth, 152 Newry St., Kilkeel, CO, Down, BT34 4ET, N. Ireland..

Further information is available at www.reynolds-jonkhoff.com , Reynolds-Jonkhoff Funeral Home in Traverse City, MI. Family will celebrate the lives of both McCann and his daughter at a private memorial held in Interlochen in August.

Detroit Free Press Article

<http://www.freep.com/article/20140616/NEWS06/306160013/McCann-science-journalism-obituary>

Detroit News Article

<http://www.detroitnews.com/article/20140618/OBITUARIES/306180126/1263/rss08>

Maureen McCann Obituary

<http://www.reynolds-jonkhoff.com/obituaries/Maureen-Mccann2/>

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