

MICKEY ARNOLD



Of Wilkinsburg, PA., died peacefully on November 7th at home with Martha, his wife of 52 years, by his side.

Born September 21, 1947 in Lilly, Pa., the fifth of six children, Mickey attended Scanlon Hill Elementary, a two-room schoolhouse, with five classmates. He played on the local Little League championship team in 1958 and formed lasting friendships playing Legion baseball. At Lilly Washington High School, his fondest memories were rooted in sports, as a standout baseball and basketball player, and weekend get-togethers with buddies at the local pool hall, where they all took aim at the best pool shot in town, "The Bear," against a backdrop of rock & roll.

Graduating high school in 1965 as the Vietnam War was ramping up, Mickey enlisted in the U.S. Navy with his childhood best friend, Mike McCarthy. First posted to the aircraft carrier USS Coral Sea, he was assigned to the signal bridge where he learned flag semaphore, the Navy's visual communications system using two hand-held flags. He loved being a Navy signalman, remarking later it was the first time in his life "he realized he could be great at something." He again deployed to Vietnam the next year aboard the USS Bennington and was on the flight deck November 9, 1967, when it was the recovery ship for the unmanned Apollo 4 space mission, the first launch of the Saturn V rocket. Mickey served a third Vietnam deployment aboard the minesweeper USS Impervious and was honorably discharged from active duty in September 1968 as a Petty Officer Third Class, serving in the Naval Reserves through 1971. Mickey earned the National Defense Service Medal and Vietnam Service Medal with Bronze Service Star.

After a brief stint as a fireman with the Penn Central Railroad in Cresson, Pa., Mickey moved to Pittsburgh, taking a job as an in-patient psychiatric aide at St. Francis Hospital in Lawrenceville, where he provided occupational and recreational therapy for patients, including teenagers, suffering with sometimes severe mental illness. The work was a life-changing experience that inspired an unwavering calling for serving at-risk young people. Mickey's heart was always with the underdog.

At St. Francis he also met the love of his life, Martha O'Donnell, a fellow aide, bonding with her over ping pong in the lounge. He asked for her hand because "she always beat me"; she said yes "because of his compassion for the patients and their situation." They married at the Pittsburgh Oratory April 30, 1971, and celebrated with a simple family lunch of corned beef sandwiches and homemade cake.

Under the GI Bill, Mickey enrolled in the Community College of Allegheny County, earning an Associate's Degree in social work, while also working for the Neighborhood Youth Corps, counseling alienated and at-risk teenagers. Around the same time, with daughter Hannah and son Aab having arrived, he opened a used furniture and antique business, the Olde Rocker Shop, with his brother-in-law Russ O'Donnell, in Regent Square where McBroom's beer store exists today – the first in a series of entrepreneurial pursuits.

Mickey continued his education at the University of Pittsburgh, attending night school to earn a B.S. degree cum laude in vocational distributive education in 1977. The same year, while pursuing a Master's in Education at Pitt, which he earned in 1980, he began a decades-long career with the Pittsburgh Public Schools.

Continuing his work with at-risk youth, Mickey worked as a teacher in the diversified occupations program at Letsche Alternative High School. To his students, he was an advocate, a mentor, and almost always the rare person who truly believed in them. His job description was to create opportunity, but his personal mission was to make them feel like he did on the signal bridge of the Coral Sea – that they could be great at something, too. And they responded. Mickey also taught at South Vo-Tech and Langley High School before retiring in 1999.

From his earliest days in the mountains, Mickey loved the outdoors, playing in the woods, camping, simply being out in the fresh air and sunshine. One day he and the boys tried to conquer the Youghiogheny River rapids in Ohio Pyle in a green family canoe called "The Good, Bad & The Ugly" – which, true to its name, hit a rock, broke apart and sank. Barely making it to safety, Mickey emerged from the water barefoot, fashioning makeshift shoes out of a discarded milk carton for the long, rocky trek back up-river. Years later, shoemaking became a second entrepreneurial pursuit.

After apprenticing with local cobblers, Mickey founded Champion Shoe Rebuilding in Swissvale as a moonlighting gig. His work was featured in a Pittsburgh Post-Gazette magazine story aptly titled: "He Puts Sole in His Work." The piece quoted a customer who said, "Another cobbler we went to didn't want to help." Mickey's reply: "I know the feeling, but there's always someone out there who will. You have to keep trying until you do." You bet he knew the feeling.

With his successful cobbler shop established, Mickey also became a Board Certified Pedorthist, creating therapeutic footwear and supportive orthotic devices for patients with disabling foot disorders.

Competitive sports were another constant throughout Mickey's life. He played on or managed more adult softball teams than his family could count each season, most memorably Night Cap, Duke Softball and Pittsburgh Gold. Many of his younger teammates regarded him as a father figure, someone who took them under his wing and made them believe in themselves. And then there was "Quick Mick" – earned as a kid and in softball with his "lightning speed running down the first base line," the nickname resurfaced in the early 2000s, as he competed in the Senior Olympics and won Gold in the 200 Meter race.

And, of course, the Pittsburgh Steelers. A season ticket holder for several years, he found his "wing men," the tight-knit crew who one year carried him in and out of the stadium after he tore his meniscus, and who will carry him off to eternal rest as pallbearers. Long since forgiven are his numerous "Irish exits" during the lean years, later known as "pulling a Mickey," after one on-field blunder too many would send him silently up the aisle, out the stadium gates, to the bus stop and home.

On October 19, 2006 Mickey and Martha's life forever changed, when he fell off the roof while working on their house and suffered a broken neck. After he surprised doctors by surviving the night, they told him he would never walk again. Through sheer force of will he proved them wrong – Mickey's walking for his last 17 years consisted of dealing with constant pain and making the few steps between his bed and his living room chair each morning, where he spent his days before returning to bed at night. It was a journey that could take an hour or more each way. But once again Mickey demonstrated something he was great at – confronting adversity and overcoming it through determination, grit and an unflinching sense of humor.

Mickey spent his later days researching his family ancestry and military service from his chair, identifying four relatives who fought in the Civil War. He eagerly looked forward to March Madness and the Little League World Series, and he continued to escape to his beloved outdoors through TV shows about everything from the mountains to the wild west and the high seas.

In addition to his wife Martha, he is survived by daughter Hannah (Mike), son Aab (Kristy), granddaughters Alana and Sydney, and his youngest brother Terry, as well as a large extended family and legions of friends who are family, including next-door neighbors and godparents Dan May and Debbie Raubenstrauch, who hold a special place in the family's hearts. He was preceded in death by his mother Agnes, father Elmer, sister Nancy Mae, and brothers Marty, Jim and Gary.

There will be no visitation. A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated Monday, November 13, 2023 at 10AM at St. Paul Cathedral in Oakland, immediately followed by a luncheon. Military burial at the Cemetery of the Alleghenies will take place later in the week in a private ceremony. The Freyvogel Mass may also be viewed via Facebook Live at [freyvogelfuneralhome.com](https://www.facebook.com/freyvogelfuneralhome) by clicking on Mickey's obituary.

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In lieu of flowers, the family has established a GoFundMe account at <https://gofundme.com/f/mickey-arnold> - the proceeds of which will go to the ballfield at the War Memorial Park in Lilly, Pa. to ensure it continues to be a field of dreams for generations to follow, as it was for Mickey. Arrangements by **JOHN A. FREYVOGEL SONS, INC.** 4900 Center Avenue at Devonshire Street ([freyvogelfuneralhome.com](https://www.freyvogelfuneralhome.com))

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