

RAYMOND "MEDI" OKER



When it came to selling souvenirs Ray 'Medi' Oker was anything but mediocre. What innocently started as a 14-year-old teenager helping his older brother Jay sell 25-cent gold shakers and 3-dollar hats at the bottom of Cardiac Hill on fall Saturday afternoons in the early 70s turned into a lifetime passion, profession, and way of life for Ray. His souvenir exploits first took him from DeSoto Street

down to Three Rivers Stadium and then over to Happy Valley where Jay and his younger brother Sol attended college. By the late 70s Morgantown and Florida bowl games turned into regular fun - and profitable - destinations. Famous for his signature lines of 'Don't be shy, step up and buy' and 'cheaper on the outside' Ray's weekend hobby turned into a full-time job when he moved down to Clearwater, FL, at age 40 to be closer to and help raise his daughter, Kerry.

Wherever there was a buck to be made Ray was there. Scalping tickets at spring training games in Florida. Pushing merchandise at Monster truck pulls in Georgia. Hawking cowboy straw hats at Kenny Chesney concerts up and down the East Coast. Championship flags at World Series victory parades in Houston. Mint julips at the Kentucky Derby. Lanyards with plastic ticket holders to the fans at the Indy 500. Who knows what at the Cherry Blossom Festival in DC, and more concerts and parades in more towns you have never heard of. The hundreds of thousands of dollars in cash that Ray took in over the years was eclipsed only by the millions of miles he put on his succession of Chrysler white mini-vans. A typical fall weekend would see Ray drive to Knoxville on Saturday, Cincy on Sunday to pass out terrible towels for \$ 20.00 each at a Steeler away game, and then stop in Alabama on the way home to peddle buttons at a Trump rally before returning home to Florida to load up for the next weekend. Way, way too many stories to tell.

Myron Cope could never have imagined back in 1975 that 40 years later Steeler Nation would be buying Terrible Towels from Ray outside stadiums in Seattle, Dallas, Phoenix, and L.A. Good-natured, upbeat, honest, engaging, and fun. The hours in the car over the roads he traveled told the story of his life. A first-ballot inductee into the Vendor Hall of Fame. Deserving of a bronze statue wearing his signature square frame black glasses, holding up a Bucco hat on the North Shore across from PNC Park.

In the end, Ray was a Pittsburgher at heart. Shipping boxes of merchandise to various 412 zip codes up until the last month of his life. Maintaining lifelong friendships with fellow Yinzers who shared in the love of the hustle. Taking Kerry and the kids to the movies at the Waterfront the day after Thanksgiving. Birthday dinners at Spaghetti Warehouse in the Strip. Graduating from Alderdice High School and Slippery Rock University. He was known in the Sq. Hill community for coaching 14th Ward baseball, coaching youth basketball at the JCC, and as a substitute gym teacher at Hillel Academy and various Pittsburgh Public Schools before moving to Florida.

After a courageous battle with cancer Ray passed away on January 19, 2024, in Clearwater, FL at the age of 66. Born to Samuel and Gloria Oker. The younger brother of Harold. Given the same unconditional love as their own three boys, Ray grew up in the foster home of Sam and Phyllis Jacobs, across the street from the Y-ICK in Squirrel Hill. Ray was predeceased by his parents, Samuel and Gloria Oker. Parents, Sam and Phyllis Jacobs; and brother, David Jacobs. He is survived by his brother, Harold (Sandy) Oker. Sister-in-law, Linda Jacobs. Brothers, Jay (Olivia) Jacobs and Sol (Jeannine) Jacobs. Devoted uncle to Amy (Robert) Grogan and Isabelle and Jesse Jacobs. Doting great uncle to Bennett and Vivian Grogan. Lifelong friend to his former wife, Nicole Bien; and a loving father to Kerry (Andrew) McCleaf; and "Grandpa" to the joy of his life grandson, Atlas.

The family invites you to join them in a celebration of Ray's life on Sunday, February 4th at the Beacon Place Social Room, 5715 Beacon Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15217 from 11:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. Donations can be made in Ray's memory to the JCC of Greater Pittsburgh, 5738 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15217.

Send condolences [post-gazette.com/gb](https://www.post-gazette.com/gb)