

JOHN "BUTCH" STURLESE



Love Letter to a Hometown

John "Butch" Sturlese, 92, of Monongahela, died peacefully on October 22, 2024, in his home at The Residence at Hilltop in Monongahela surrounded by love and grace. Family history: preceding him in death are his dad, John Luciano Sturlese (Genoa, Italy); mom, Jean Grajewski (Jersey City, NJ); and sis, Eleanor Sturlese (Pittsburgh).

A long-time resident and neighbor of the Mon Valley, Butch saw the world through the lens of Monongahela, and deeply appreciated its deep, rich heritage. He admired, honored, and came to emulate the soul and culture of the people of Mon City - their old-steel-town goodness and grit, and the heavy industry gifts they bore from their common labor and sense of pride in the work of their hands. Butch, too, took pride in manual labor, working as a machinist for a local factory producing durable goods for the people of the Mon Valley. A town steeped in ancient Americana and long known for its coal and steel production; for distilling 'Monongahela Rye' barrel-aged mash rye whiskey; and for providing rest stops along the Underground Railroad route, Monongahela is also known for being the second smallest city in Pennsylvania - and just the right size for Butch to live and thrive and view the world from its perch.

His was a love story with a region once known around the world for its wealth, its productivity, and for the steel it supplied. Monongahela, his forever home, where like her River that created a sense of connectedness to the larger world, it provided for him a common thread: a sense of community and place, to recreate and reflect. Monongahela: an old River that passes between steep hills and old countryside, where once-upon-a-bluff was an important meeting place during the Whiskey Rebellion. Monongahela: a wide River that ran alongside the rails, and in former days, made stopovers along the Underground Railroad route. Monongahela: a deep River that carried steel and coal, vestiges of past glory and the industrialization of America. Monongahela: a major River, one of only three, that flows northward, much like Butch's internal compass: true north (Jesus Christ) and magnetic north, always returning home (Monongahela).

Monongahela is recognized as the 'Kindest City in America' by the State of Pennsylvania and the Federal Government, and Butch adopted that Monongahela philosophy early in life. With his contagious smile and warm ways, Butch made friends with everyone he'd meet. He basked in the deep and loving memory of his family long passed, his mom and dad and sister, Eleanor - and he honored their memory by carrying that warmth and goodness into the world. The world was his mission field, and he never missed the opportunity to do what he was born and raised to do: serve his country, love his neighbor, and honor God.

In 1951, Butch enlisted in the U.S. Army, assigned to the 522 Infantry Division as a rifleman. Stationed stateside during the Korean War, Butch served for a combined 10 years in both the U.S. Army and U.S. Army Reserve achieving Infantry Sergeant rank. Butch returned home to Mon City and continued to serve, this time sharing his gifts with the community and his neighbors for several years through benevolent organizations including Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, teaching young men life-affirming skills; Meals on Wheels, delivering life-giving meal kits to the sick and homebound; and The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, providing a lifeline to those in need. Throughout the years, Butch never missed an opportunity to quietly and without fanfare, champion the cause for those less fortunate or confined to their home due to circumstance. He befriended and stayed connected, visited and cheered them, and never forgot about them. He also administered Holy Communion to the sick and homebound serving as an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion for the Catholic church, offering them the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. His was a heart that knew no bounds.

Butch was deeply devoted to his Faith and a lifelong member of his home church: St. Andrew the Apostle Parish. He also used his gifts and talents to encourage and inspire others with his athletic prowess and sportsmanship, starting from an early age at the Monongahela Turners, the Mon Valley YMCA, caddying at the Mon Valley Country Club, and participating in the Senior Olympics for over two decades - earning him numerous medals, trophies, and awards in several competitive categories. Butch was also an avid sportsman and cherished the local land and its riches; fishing, kayaking, and rowing on the Mon River, and camping and hunting in the surrounding areas. When he distance-traveled, it was always by car - with a kayak strapped to the roof - to visit friends across the northeast and into the south, where he would swim, fish, and kayak in and around tributaries and the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of Mexico... Then, after a short stay with friends, he would long again to return to his forever home, Monongahela. His life was like a love letter to a Valley that was once the land of opportunity, the living dream to immigrant laborers like his father before him, who would trade everything they knew for a chance at a better life - and a place that, to his very last breath, Butch believed had a beauty yet to be discovered... And that's where you will find Butch still today - in his final resting place, under a shade tree, next to his mom and dad, at Monongahela Cemetery.

Butch is survived by several nieces and nephews and numerous friends he made along the way. His light may have dimmed but his warmth remains. "Death is not extinguishing the light it is only putting out the lamp because the dawn has come." (R. Tagore) "He has fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith." (2 Timothy 4:7). Rest in Peace, kind gentleman, tender warrior, and good friend.

Warmest thanks and deepest gratitude to local business friends who have helped us with Butch's care this past year: City of Monongahela Police Department, Tri-Community Ambulance, Penn Highlands Mon Valley Hospital - Home Care Programs Social Workers, Union Prescription Center, Enhanced Community Care Services, Aging Services of Washington County, HM Home & Community Services, Amedisys Home Care Nurses, Charleroi Federal Savings Bank, State Farm Insurance, City Mission, Rabe Trading Post, Washington Co. VA Outpatient Clinic, Abram Weimer, DO, Randall Rodriguez, DMD, R.G. Krishnan, MD, Michael Perozzi, DPM, John Holets, MD... and most especially, and with the greatest respect and love: Lignelli Manor, ICare Long Term Solutions, The Residence at Hilltop, OSPTA Home Health & Hospice, St. Andrew the Apostle Parish, and the Marshall Marra Funeral Home. Friends will be received in the **MARSHALL MARRA FUNERAL HOME**, 216 Chess St., Monongahela 724-258-6767 from 9:30-11:30 a.m. on Friday, October 25, 2024, with blessing prayers beginning at 11:30 a.m. followed by a Mass of Christian Burial at Noon, celebrated in St. Andrew the Apostle Parish, Monongahela. Interment will be held in Monongahela Cemetery with military honors conducted by the Mon-Valley Honor and Firing Squad. Condolences may be left online at marshallmarrafuneralhome.com.

In lieu of flowers or donations, please consider offering someone a heartfelt smile and telling them they matter.

Send condolences post-gazette.com/gb