



Wes A. Hird

May 15, 1931 - November 22, 2022

Wes A. Hird, 91 of Kearney passed away Tuesday, November 22, 2022 at Cambridge Court in Kearney. Funeral services will be 10:30 am Wednesday, November 30, 2022 at Kearney First United Methodist Church. Interment will be held at Prairie Center Cemetery at Haven's Chapel. Visitation will be 5:00 to 7:00 pm Tuesday at O'Brien Straatmann Redinger Funeral Home.

Wes was born to James and Ethel Hird on a farm near Cheyenne Wells, Colorado, on May 15, 1931, during the Great Depression and Dust Bowl years, the youngest of thirteen kids. He spent his first eight years on that Colorado farm, helping his Dad and his brothers eke out a living on the harsh eastern prairie. In 1939 the family moved back to Nebraska near Poole, where they continued to farm and the children still at home went to country schools. His oldest brother John Clyde helped influence Dad's love for music, teaching him how to play guitar and introducing him to big band and jazz styles; styles that weren't commonly heard at the square dances his family gave. Following an injury playing football on the Pleasanton High School team, Wes dropped out of school in the 9th grade, to help out more on the farm after his Dad's death in 1945. As his teen years passed, Wes worked a variety of jobs to provide money for his Mom, including a stint with the REA, Rural Electrification Association which provided the first electrical service to rural farms and communities. In 1950 as the Korean War heated up, Wes enlisted in the Air Force before he could be drafted into the Army. Fate allowed him to

join the 740th Air Force Band at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida, a move that changed his life and set his future as a musician in motion. While stationed at MacDill, he met the love of his life, Jean Lewis, whom he married on November 24th, 1952 after only a three month courtship. After leaving the Air Force in 1953, they stayed in Tampa where Wes played with a variety of jazz and big bands and gained a notoriety as a very gifted musician. He taught himself how to play the double bass, and trombone. He had the opportunity to play for a number of famous artists, including Bob Hope, the Everly Brothers, and Don Goldie. A simpler life in Nebraska was calling though, and in 1968, Wes and Jean moved to Kearney, where his childhood friend, Clark Yanda, persuaded him to work for him at his new music store, Yanda's Music. In 1972, after many years of trying, Wes and Jean had their daughter, Betsy. Wes went on to work many years for Sears, while becoming heavily involved in the local music scene. He would eventually form the Wes and Verle Duo with Verle Straatman, as well as playing with many others: Jim Gustafson, Lois and Todd Thalken, Jon Berlin, Ellie Frasier, Norm Sodomka, Greg Tesdall, Vickie Nielsen, Ron Crockef, and Phill Parker to name just a few. In the early 80's, Verle taught him how to tune pianos, another fateful intervention that provided Wes with a rewarding 30 year career. In 1992, he became the piano tuner and technician for the University of Nebraska at Kearney music department, where he would stay until his retirement in 2006. Even after retirement from UNK, Wes continued to stay busy doing private tunings, and of course, playing music. He was a longtime member of the Piano Tuner's and Technician's Guild, the Elk's club and the VFW. In 2011 he was awarded the Kearney Hub Freedom Award in Arts and Entertainment, for his devotion to helping young musicians pursue their passion. Wes was a staple at Kearney social events, playing regularly at the Wine and Jazz Festival, MONA Sounds of Summer, and the Kearney Area Arts Council Concerts in the Park. He enjoyed spending time with family, traveling, tinkering with his computer, reading Louis L'Amour westerns, and watching his beloved Kansas City Royals baseball team.

Left to cherish his memory are his wife, Jean Hird of Kearney; daughter, Betsy (Steven) Warren of Kearney; as well as many nieces, nephews, extended family and friends. Wes was preceded in death by his parents, 6 sisters and 6 brothers.

Someone once said of him, "Wes IS jazz in Kearney." He was held in admiration by so many, not only for his musical talent, but for being a salt of the earth kind of person. He was a terrific friend, uncle, husband, and father and will be very much missed.

Memorials are suggested to the Kearney Arts Council. Condolences may be shared online at www.osrfh.com. Services are entrusted to O'Brien Straatmann Redinger Funeral and Cremation Services.

Cemetery Details

Prairie Center Cemetery at Haven's Chapel

31918 160th Road
Kearney, NE

Previous Events

Visitation

NOV **29**. 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM (CT)

O'Brien Straatmann Redinger Funeral Homes and Cremations
4115 Ave N
Kearney, NE 68847
(308) 234-3500
info@osrfh.com
<https://www.osrfh.com>

Funeral Service

NOV **30**. 10:30 AM (CT)

First United Methodist Church
4500 Linden Drive
Kearney, NE 68847

Tribute Wall



“ Wes A. Hird

January 28, 2023 at 08:01 AM



“ I was a Musican Union guitar player in Lincoln, Nebr from 1954 to 1958 playing for Johnny Cox's Combos with musicians who knew most songs "by ear" as written in 2 articles in the Kearney Hub about Wes Hird & Verl Stratman. We were able to see & and hear the "Wes & Vern Duo" only once but I have never forgotten the remarkable skill of Wes on the guitar! Wes 's love of Classic Country, 1925-1958 popular Hits & Jazz mirror my life too! (And my Dad's life, which was music!). Thank you Betsy for sharing Wes's wonderful life! Roger Schroeder, Holbrook, Nebr

Roger Schroeder - December 01, 2022 at 12:21 PM



“ We were privileged to become acquainted with Wes in the early 1980's because he came to our Custer County community to tune several pianos on a regular basis. He "autographed" the interior string plate each time, which helped us keep track of how long it was between tunings. Those autographs serve as a history, and forever connect us to Wes and the men who came before him. Wonderful memories! RIP my friend!

Kevin Cooksley - November 30, 2022 at 06:42 AM



“ *Florist Choice Bouquet was purchased for the family of Wes A. Hird.*



November 29, 2022 at 11:02 AM



“ *Some of my folks' funnest stories were from dinners and dancing with Wes and Jean. I treasure the memory of a great friend, superb band mate and a generous guy. (Thanks again for the piano!) Dirk*

Dirk Christensen - November 28, 2022 at 10:59 AM



“ *Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Wes A. Hird.*



November 28, 2022 at 10:24 AM



“ *I remember Wes well. One very early Christmas morning Weds helped us pull out a burning piano out of our house. A candle had been left burning in a centerpiece on top of our piano on Christmas Eve.*

We enjoyed his music and singing and we and the people in Kearney will miss him.

Carla Brooke

Carla Brooke - November 26, 2022 at 04:37 PM

KB

“ *My great Uncle Wes was just that, Great! I loved him so much. I loved listening to him play and sing. I especially loved it when he played and sang with my Grandpa Ray Hird and all of us kids. I spent a lot of time at his house with Betsy while growing up and those memories will stay with me forever. I will miss him so much. Sending a lot of love to the family right now. I know Uncle Wes it up in Heaven with his parents and his brothers and sisters having the best time!*

Karna Brittain - November 26, 2022 at 01:45 PM

MK

“ *All the music lovers of Kearney will miss Wes...he brought us such joy over the years!---Mary Kommers*

Mary S Kommers - November 26, 2022 at 10:27 AM



“ *Wes was a towering figure in Kearney's arts and culture. Thanks, Wes, for all the joy you brought to us time and time again. Your old black magic had us in your spell! Chuck and Nancy Peek*

Charles Peek - November 24, 2022 at 10:20 AM

BC

“ *I was one of those younger musicians that Wes mentored. He taught me so much about jazz bass when I played in combos with him. I will be forever grateful. My thoughts and prayers are with you all during this time. Lovingly, Bonnie Coffman*

Bonnie Coffman - November 23, 2022 at 08:08 PM



“ *It has been many years, but I met my great Uncle Wes more than once at family gatherings. He was a happy soul. His smile was contagious. He was just such an amazing and talented individual. He will definitely be missed. Sending you love, hugs and warm wishes from overseas.*

Wendy Sandstrom - November 23, 2022 at 05:09 PM