



Otto Biddle McNaughton, Jr.

July 10, 1921 - December 26, 2014

Otto Biddle McNaughton Jr., age 93, passed away Friday, December 26, 2014 at his home on the shore of Lake Superior in the company of his children. Otto was born on Sunday, July 10, 1921 in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan to Otto Biddle and Regina Carmella (Roll) McNaughton Sr. He was a shy boy but flourished under the tutelage of his adoring parents, who never raised a hand or voice to him. He adopted a strong moral code early in life and this prevailed over his timidity. At age seven, Otto and his friends accidentally shot out a neighbor's window during a game of baseball. His friends ran away from the scene. Otto, alone, approached the neighbor's door to confess their fault and arrange for restitution. In 1926, he was diagnosed with polio and held back a year in school, but he beat the malady with a strict diet and exercise regimen. From that point on, diet and exercise were highly important concepts for him. Otto attended Garfield Elementary School and continued on to Sault High School. Always enthusiastic for physical activity, he excelled in class swimming, track, and tumbling. After school in the winters, he shouldered his skis up a hill on the south side of town and skied until sunset. He participated in and presided over several student groups such as Speech Club, Student Council, and Atom Crackers, a group, according to the yearbook, which studied the "finer points of photography" and made "investigations of scientific interest." Otto also contributed to theatrical performances as a member of Jr.-Sr. play, the group launching a production of "You Can't Take It with You," among other displays their senior year. After high school, Otto worked briefly

as a messenger at Union Carbide before enrolling at Notre Dame in September, 1941. At Notre Dame, he became proficient at boxing, archery, and trapeze work in addition to his intellectual studies. Words in his high school yearbook which reflected the sentiment at the time had stuck with him, however. They said: "Service to our country should be foremost in our minds. And the time has come when our country needs youthful vigor and enthusiasm..." Otto identified easily with the message and in March, 1943 he enlisted in the Army. Interested in flying pursuit aircraft, he applied for Army Air Corps and officer training. Ultimately though, the Army needed him for his skiing prowess, and so in September of 1944 he was transferred to the Tenth Mountain Division. With the Tenth, he had a unique way of solving problems, and his innovations in training a mule, handling a rifle, and working in a foxhole were quickly adopted by his fellow soldiers. For his important work on Riva Ridge in the Italian Apennines and for saving the life of a fellow soldier, Otto was awarded several medals, including the Bronze Star and Purple Heart. Back in Sault Ste. Marie after the war, Otto got on with his life. Along with many young people his age, he loved to relax by ice skating at the Puller Stadium. It was here that he first eyed a beautiful girl of eighteen, Mary Catherine Leahy Giacoletto, and offered to walk her home. The couple was married on May 28, 1948 in St. Mary's Catholic Church by Father Joseph E. Guertin. As Otto built a family with Mary, they still attended to their playful whims. Early dance lessons that Otto and his friends had contracted continued to pay off. The couple attended dances hosted by the "Married Peoples' Club" at the Ojibway Hotel as well as Hospital Auxiliary Balls. Throughout the years, he and Mary regularly got together with their friends who collectively started the "Charades Club." A sporting group, members assigned the players such tasks as "Life in a putty knife factory" and "I'm so lonesome in my saddle since my horse died." Winters, the friends added sleigh rides to their fun, as well as skating parties at the Puller rink, followed by a meal of hot chili at the American Café. By this time, Otto had finished his degree at Northern Michigan University and continued with graduate work at

NMU and the University of Michigan while teaching at National Mine. He moved on to teach biology at Sault High where he is most remembered for his passion for natural science, but also for his insistence on courteous and moral behavior from his students. Rather than assigning his students with the tasks of twig, leaf, and insect collections, he took them outside where they observed and identified nature in its natural state. Otto supplemented his income with summer work as an inspector for the U. S. Customs Service. He began working at the ferry dock before the International Bridge was built and continued at the Bridge when it opened for traffic on October 31, 1962. After retiring from teaching, he worked at the Bridge full-time, where the comradery with fellow officials was very dear to him. He maintained those strong friendships long after his retirement in January of 1996. Years later, the U. S. Customs Service hosted a special celebratory gathering and toast to honor Otto for his bravery in World War II. Otto loved swimming and became a strong swimmer by the time he reached high school. Once during his Army days, while swimming in the Atlantic off the coast of South Carolina, he saved a woman who had been snatched from safer waters by a riptide. Otto continued swimming late in life, one to three miles per day, three to four days per week, until a shoulder injury at age ninety-one prevented him from doing so. Observers say he swam with the grace and beauty of one who is comrades with the water. Otto loved the outdoors and he instilled in his nine children a love of the outdoors. He took them on nature hikes and camping, snowshoeing and downhill skiing, sailing and canoeing, fishing and hunting, waterskiing and climbing. He passed along his sense of adventure, his thirst for adrenaline, and the rush of simply being alive. His motto was "Work hard, play hard." He fit as much into his life as possible by shortening the time it took him to do tasks, and by pushing the boundaries of time allotted for pleasurable activity. When he said he had errands to run, he meant run. Pedestrians observed him running from car to grocery store to bank to post office. In the springtime while there was still ice floating in St. Mary's River, he

rose early in order to get a round of waterskiing in with his children before he had to be at the high school to teach. In recent years, Otto loved going for walks, observing wildlife, and occasionally photographing what he saw. He took up bird watching and read about common and rare birds which he identified on a daily basis. He was moved by beautiful music and still delighted in attending orchestral and vocal concerts. At home, his favorites were old musical soundtracks and the Notre Dame Marching Band. Otto did many things but he never complained, and he never spoke unkindly of anyone. He was polite, courteous, considerate, and always looked for the best in a person. He never did anything halfway. He challenged himself to use all of his ability, and then a bit more. In that way, he was an intense person. He was blessed with curiosity and harbored the drive to solve it. Otto always had new ideas to explore, and he was incredibly focused. He had an innate gratitude for life. Even in his last few months when asked, "How are you today, Otto?" he replied, "I'm comfortable and glad of it." Otto is survived by his nine children: Patricia (George) Maas, Mary Catherine Leahy McNaughton (David Beauchesne), Kevin McNaughton (Denise), Nancy (Kent) McPherson, Sheila McNaughton, Barbara (Mitch) Dalman, Otto Biddle (Beth) McNaughton III, Amy McNaughton, Andrea (Mark) Williamson, sixteen grandchildren, nine great-grandchildren, thirteen nieces and nephews, many great-nieces and nephews, and many dear friends. Otto was preceded in death by his wife, Mary, who passed away December 26, 2010. Also preceding his death was his sister, Agatha Piedmont, and brother, John McNaughton. Funeral services will be held at St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan Friday, January 2, 2015. Visitation will take place at St. Joseph's O'Callaghan Hall from 10 a.m. until 12 p.m. A Mass of Christian burial will follow at 12 p.m. with celebrants, Reverend Norbert Landreville and Reverend Jose Maramattam. A celebratory luncheon will follow in the church hall. In lieu of flowers, contributions can be considered to Hospice of the EUP, St. Joseph's Catholic Church, or a charity of one's choice.

Tribute Wall

MM

“ For what ever reason, just had the need to search Cathy McNaughton. And saw yor father's obituary. Wow what an amazing man. I called Michael and we talked. Even though Michael was so young he recalls some incredible events that Otto had told us about and that always had us on the edge of our seats. And I do to. Miss you all so much. Michael had a birthday on January 15th. Sent him a Birthday card and a picture of mother Mary. I guess you were all on my mind. My phone 813-495-6639. Maureen777@aol.com

Maureen Nemchek Miller - January 26, 2015 at 12:00 AM

JS

“ I am so sorry to read of death of your dad. He was a great man who has left a big inprint in the Soo. Your family is in our thoughts and prays.

Janet Malcolm Smith - December 30, 2014 at 12:00 AM

DH

“ My prayers go out to all of Mr. McNaughton's children. He was an awesome Biology teacher and when I worked with you mom at Bev's Fabrics, he would stop by and always left us with a smile. He will always be remembered as one of the Sault's best!. Take care, Diane

Diane Honkanen - December 30, 2014 at 12:00 AM

A(

“ Nancy and family, so very sorry to learn of your father's death. He certainly had quite a life and is an inspiration. May you be comforted by your memories of him.

Anne LaLonde (Meagher) - December 30, 2014 at 12:00 AM

PA

“ Thoughts and prayers go out to your family. Loosing one you love is never easy; this wonderful man would want you to celebrate life, remember all those good times and be happy for he is back wife his bride whom he loved so dearly as he loved ALL his family. He was such a joy to be around. God bless

Patty - December 30, 2014 at 12:00 AM