



Robert Peele "Rob" Cowan

February 7, 1943 - February 8, 2022

Robert "Rob" Peele Cowan, 79, passed away on February 8th, 2022, at War Memorial Hospital with his two daughters by his side after a car accident.

Rob was born in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan in 1943 and considered himself a lifelong resident of Sugar Island though he also spent time in Marquette and Charlevoix, Michigan. He attended Kent School in Connecticut and Beloit College in Wisconsin but found formal education restrictive and stifling. Rob's curiosity for understanding how things work was insatiable; he was immensely well read and self-taught in many areas including mechanical repair, engineering, biological sciences, ecology, wood working, and many other fields.

Rob's passion for fixing mechanical things led him through his life in both his career and personal hobbies. He owned and operated Cowan's Service on Portage Road (import car repair) from approximately 1973-1985. Following that he designed and built candle making equipment for Bullfrog Light Company, managed machining for Michigan Scientific, and supervised the parts department for World Cars USA.

He loved wild birds and hated red squirrels, though generally loved all wildlife and shared careful reports of animal activity around the island with distant family and friends. For many years Rob boiled syrup from the sugar maples

that Sugar Island is named for and often shared the sweet result as gifts. He hunted ducks along the St. Mary's River and had many successful deer hunts at his sister Selden's camp. He maintained a large garden with many fruit trees and bushes, frequently canning and freezing produce. Sugar Island was his personal haven.

Rob was known for both polite manners and strong opinions most often voiced over a beer or two (or three). He had a goofy sense of humor, both charming and wacky. He was a loving father that quietly doted on his daughters. He believed strongly in the values of family, independence, and honesty.

Rob is survived by his two daughters, Catharine and Jennifer; and his son, Pierre. He is also survived by his sisters Selden and Mary Byrd; nieces, Nancye, Emily, Akemi, and Chris; and nephews, Mahlon, Michael, and Terry.

Rob is preceded in death by his parents G. Harrison and Nancye Cowan; and his brother Gilbert Cowan Jr.

A memorial celebration will be held on Sugar Island at a later date, tentatively Labor Day weekend 2022, details to be determined.

In lieu of flowers, donations in Rob's name may be made to Hospice of the Eastern UP (<https://www.hospiceoftheup.com>), Sugar Island Fire and Ambulance Department (<http://www.sugarislandtownship.com/id11.html>), or the Chippewa County Historical Society (<https://www.cchsmi.com>).

Please share memories, photos or comments about Rob on the Galer Funeral Home website www.galerfuneralhomes.com or Rob's Facebook page.

Tribute Wall



“ Robert Peele "Rob" Cowan

October 05, 2023 at 09:54 AM



“ Robert Peele "Rob" Cowan

October 02, 2023 at 10:14 PM



“ Robert Peele "Rob" Cowan

September 01, 2022 at 07:49 PM



“ Rob and I were good friends in Marquette. I was his housemate for awhile. I enjoyed spending time with the Cowan family on Sugar Island. Fond memories of hunting ducks and the Hilltop. I last saw Rob in 2001 and talked to him on the phone after that. Sorry to hear of his passing.
Tom Arminski

Tom Arminski - June 14, 2022 at 11:34 AM



Hi Tom, can you please call me at 801-52-4988? Jen (Rob's daughter)

Jen Grippa - August 18, 2022 at 12:15 PM



801-520-4988 (couldn't find a way to edit my previous entry)

Jen Grippa - August 18, 2022 at 12:31 PM

RP

“ *Richard Payment lit a candle in memory of Robert Peele "Rob" Cowan*



Richard Payment - February 17, 2022 at 11:50 AM

KS

“ *Cat and Jen, Mary B, Terry, Selden and All, very sorry for your loss. Rob was one of my favorite people. I always loved coming over to your place as a kid and I got to know Rob especially well when he worked at the candle shop and lived at my parent's and grandmother's places in Saginaw and Charlevoix. I always stopped by to see him on the island every summer when I was up here. My kids still remember the bats and all the other cool things hanging on his walls from when they were young and I still have a jar of red current jelly we made from his bushes. I will miss him. Best to you all. Hope we can get together this summer. Keith Stewart*

Keith Stewart - February 15, 2022 at 01:49 PM

MP

“ *Selden, Mahlon and family Debby and I are sorry for your loss. Our prayers are with you and your entire family. I didn't know your brother Selden but if he was anything like you he was an amazing person.*

Mike Posten - February 15, 2022 at 12:55 PM

MZ

“ *Robert brought us to Sugar Island 50+ years ago. We still go ever year. We will miss his strong opinions and keen intellect. Pete and Peg Zabinski*

Margaret Zabinski - February 15, 2022 at 08:46 AM

RN

“ Robert made you feel welcome every time we dropped in over the 50+ decades we have know him. When ever he and I discussed the matters of the world we manage to stay friends. The memories of the 4th of July celebrations are as numerous as the mosquitos feeding on us. We will miss him.
Ron and Nicole

Ron and Nic - February 14, 2022 at 09:28 PM



“ My condolences to all the family. Growing up with Cat and Jen, Rob introduced me to many things. Calvin and Hobbs, Monty Python, food I either hated or learned to tolerate, how to set a table for dinner, garlic breath. I won't forget how he had patience when Cat wanted to nurse baby mice they found in a drawer. Or the rides to Charlevoix in the summer. Thanks to him, I have some pretty cool childhood memories and Rob will always be in my heart for all the experiences he let me join in on with Cat and Jen.

Robyn Hungerford - February 14, 2022 at 07:58 PM

JG

“ My last picture of my dad's hands...love you Dad-do - Jenny



Jen Grippa - February 14, 2022 at 07:32 PM



Oh Jen, this made me cry and brought back memories of my mom and dad. There simply is nothing like a parent. 💔

Emily Cowan - February 14, 2022 at 09:11 PM

CA

“ Will miss this stubborn old man more than words can say



Cat - February 14, 2022 at 07:25 PM



You are not alone Cat. 💔

Emily Cowan - February 14, 2022 at 09:16 PM

DC

Our visits to the Soo always were highlights of our summer. I always looked forward to conversations with Rob and keeping in touch with him over the years via email was a true pleasure. All the best from Dave and Donna Cowan and the Canadian branch of the family.

Dave Cowan - February 15, 2022 at 07:22 AM

JD

Robert and I were married for 14 years and together even more. He had so many great qualities as a man and husband and I cherish all the years we had. There were so many amazing experiences we had on the island and his curiosity was infectious. The best thing we did together was have two amazing girls and we both cherished the gift of parenthood. We did go our separate ways but continued to co parent and to celebrate the girl's milestones happily in each others company. I'm so glad he was able to spend his last years on the island that he loved so much.

Jan Darr - February 15, 2022 at 01:55 PM

DD

My wife, Jan, was married to Robert. I got to know him well through the girls and visits to the Island. We would exchange email jokes. One year, the girls were in college and could not get up to the Soo for Christmas. Jan and I invited Robert to come down and stay at our house which he did. He was a wonderful guest. The best part was that he would drink a beer with my mom. He will be missed.

Don Darr - February 15, 2022 at 05:46 PM

DB

I will miss my neighbor who was always good for a stimulating conversation and lots of information about the island. Just sitting and listening to conversations between him and Allan Swanson was priceless. As new folks to the island some 25 years ago an invitation of his Fourth of July party was extra special. Perhaps the closest I ever experience with him was the night his house burned. We sat watching the embers glow and he pulled up memories from the past that were special.

Dave Bean - February 16, 2022 at 01:14 PM

JD

I met Rob & Jan in the fall of 1972. Like so many others I have 50 years of wonderful memories. I will be pleased to remember that the last voice mail message I had from him, just a few days before his death, was a laughing request to know if I was digging out of the snow storm we had just had here down state.

Judi Dow - February 20, 2022 at 09:31 AM

SR

I'm a cousin of Rob's on my dad's mother's side and have wonderful memories of an impromptu family reunion on Sugar Island back in 1978 as my parents were taking me out to school in Minnesota. Rob made an indelible impression; I was actually trying again to find him on FB, so was deeply saddened to learn of his passing. Sincerest sympathies to Jennifer (whom I remember as a toddler), Catharine and Pierre, as well as Jan, Mary Byrd and Selden. My mother, brother and I think of you all fondly.

Sean Reilly - April 02, 2022 at 11:19 AM

LW

I went to college in Marquette, we lived in the dorm, Rob got me a job at Lindy's campus shell in 1967, I had NO auto skills, He moved to a tiny house just off campus where my pals and I would visit, we heard a bunch a music (probably Canadian)

louie wildfong - April 17, 2025 at 01:47 PM