



Dr. Riley Gardner

October 31, 1921 - October 23, 2007

Riley Gardner didn't like funerals. He said that when he lost a friend many years ago, he went to his friend's funeral and his friend wasn't there. He never went to another funeral. Riley was born in Ree Heights, South Dakota, on October 31, 1921. He died peacefully on Tuesday, October 23, 2007, with his family around him in the good care of Aldersgate and Heart of America Hospice. He was brave and his attitude was matter-of-fact as he faced death. His family buried his ashes at Mount Calvary Cemetery on Friday, October 26. From his class of ten students, Riley liked to say he was the top 10% of his Ree Heights High School graduating class. He graduated from Yankton College, summa cum laude, in 1945. He worked full time throughout his college years as an editor and musician. He was a staff sergeant in the US Army Medical Corps, serving 1946 – 1948, where he was introduced to psychiatric care and the study of mental health. He earned a PhD in psychology from the University of Kansas in 1952, summa cum laude, a member of Phi Beta Kappa. Riley married Ruth Janssen on August 27, 1950, in Yankton, South Dakota. She survives. Riley's professional career was like a shooting star, brief and brilliant. He was a research psychologist at the Menninger Foundation from 1951 to 1971. Surrounded by the sophisticated professional staff at Menninger, he thought he might be the only one who felt like he came to a Big City when he moved to Topeka. In the 1960s and into the 1970s his work in individual differences and cognition was published, translated and quoted around the world. Income from his publications came in

rupees and yen, lira, pesos and pounds. His children were delighted to find references to his work in their college psychology textbooks and also in their German cousins' textbooks. He was recognized with many professional honors including two major grants from the National Institutes of Health and invitations to teach in seminars and at universities around the USA and abroad. He was a theoretician. When he couldn't find a psychological test or equipment to study the fields he wanted to explore, he invented his own. As the president of the Kansas Psychological Association he successfully lobbied for the certification of psychologists in Kansas which was controversial at the time. One source of great pleasure for him was his in-depth study of 105 pairs of local twins. For all of his fame in his field, maybe his personal favorite recognition was his honorary invitation to membership in Topeka's Mothers of Twins Club. Riley had a hungry mind. He was a lifelong student of music, the English language, geography, and every aspect of science. As his physical health failed, the Internet gave him satisfying access to the breaking news in his various fields of interest. In his last weeks, he was learning about quantum physics from a DVD recording of a Stanford University class and a book by Stephen Hawking. The child of a piano teacher, Riley was an accomplished musician. Until emphysema took his wind, he played clarinet and saxophone in swing bands and chamber music groups. There was always music in his head and in his life. Riley had his hobbies. He tinkered with maintaining the same home since 1953. He enjoyed growing flowers and he worked hard nurturing his lawn. His ongoing battle with crab grass provided some neighborhood children with their first exposure to "cussing a blue streak." He loved taking care of cars. He drove his cars for decades, most famously a 1950 Chevy that he drove for 30 years. He made a name for himself in certain circles by painting his aging automobiles with a brush or hobby-and-craft spray paint from Woolworth's. He liked catching trout with a fly rod. His humor was whimsical. When there was no term for whatever he wanted to express, he would make one up. He was creative and fun, completely unrestricted by convention. Driven and intense in his working years as a psychologist, Riley

came home on his 49th birthday a different man. His research programs went on without him for some years beyond that day, but he was rarely seen at his office again. He struggled with mental illness at various points throughout his life. It was hard to tell if this transition was healthy or a lapse, but in retirement he found the happiest role of his life: there has never been a more devoted grandfather. For granddaughter Samantha Crow and her friends, Riley was simply "Opa." He loved his role as her full-time caregiver, tutor and companion while her parents worked. He became an active school volunteer when she went to school. He was the chauffeur for her and her friends daily. To everyone's surprise but his own, he reveled in his role as a nurturing caregiver. While he was not a religious man, Riley believed with all of his heart that the universe is a maximizing process and that it is the responsibility of each and all of us to contribute to the positive energy as best we can, including to be good to each other without exception. Those who loved him aspire to follow his lead. Riley is survived by his wife of 57 years, Ruth Gardner. Their daughter Helen Crow and her husband Dan live in Topeka; granddaughter Samantha Crow now lives in Palo Alto, CA. Riley and Ruth's son Mark Gardner and Mark's daughter Daya English live in Minneapolis, MN. Riley's sister Katherine McElwain, 90, lives in Silver Springs, MD. Arrangements were handled by the Kevin Brennan Family Funeral Home. Memorial contributions may be made to Topeka's Latch-Keyboard Project, providing music for children who cannot afford private keyboard music study, c/o Dr. Shiao-Li Ding, Washburn University, 1700 SW College, Topeka, KS 66621.

Tribute Wall



“ *Dr. Riley Gardner*

January 28, 2023 at 12:08 PM



“ *My deepest sympathies to the both of you Ruth and Helen.*

Marie Cain - October 29, 2007 at 10:40 AM



“ *I am so sorry to lose a long-time friend of mine. My condolences to Ruth, Helen and Mark.*

Lolafaye

Lolafaye Coyne - October 25, 2007 at 08:26 PM



“ *Helen, our thoughts and prayers are with you! Know this has been a difficult time.*

Bev Woodford - October 25, 2007 at 07:18 PM



“ *Dan, Helen, Ruth, and Mark, Our thoughts are with you during this difficult time. Your family is one of few that I have known 'my whole life' and from generation to generation, and our friendship has meant alot to our family. We are very sorry to hear of your loss. Love, Don, Laurie, Graham and Merritt Rosen*

Don Rosen - October 25, 2007 at 09:44 AM

SA

“ To Helen, Dan and Samantha,

We wanted to extend our deepest sympathies to each of you. This is always a difficult time, but know that he is at peace and that he had a long and wonderful life with family and friends.

Steve and Gayle

Steve and Gayle Alejos - October 25, 2007 at 09:21 AM

HB

“ Helen, Dan, and Ruth,

Opa was so wonderful! I didn't know my own grandfathers, so I feel very lucky to have gotten to share Samantha's wise, fun, kooky, engaging grandpa. I hope you are all healing and well.

Hannah Ballou - October 25, 2007 at 08:40 AM

SP

“ Helen, My prayers are with you and your family during this difficult time. Just know that you have the support and love of all your friends. Sheryl

Sheryl Pheasant - October 25, 2007 at 08:29 AM