

Deceased Name: Gerald R. "Jerry" McClelland

Gerald R. "Jerry" McClelland, Leesburg native, Air Force veteran, attorney, father, and grandfather, died on September 10. He was 83. Born in Leesburg on March 29, 1932, Jerry attended Sheen Elementary and Leesburg High School, graduating in the class of 1950. From 1949 to 1952, he served in the Florida National Guard, helping to quell violence against black citizens in Mascotte and Groveland, for which he received a state service medal. At FSU, Jerry studied psychology, acted, and sang opera. Graduating in 1954, Jerry next taught math, English, and history at Leesburg High School. In 1955, he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force, training as a pilot of multi-engine aircraft. In 1956, he was assigned as a pilot to the 780th Troop Carrier Squadron in Evreux, France. For the next two years, Jerry flew many missions in varied aircraft through Western Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. Rising to the rank of Captain, he was commended for his participation in the airlift of American civilians from Cairo, Egypt, during the Suez Crisis. He wrote of his travels: "I've seen belly dancers in Tunis and Flamenco dancers in Seville. I've seen the sunrise at Marrakesh and felt the heat of the sun on the Sahara. I've had escargot in Paris, and I've had Fettuccine Alfredo--made by Alfredo himself in Rome." Discharged honorably from the Air Force in 1958 (he would remain in the Air Force Reserve for more than a decade), that same year Jerry was invited to audition at the prestigious Juilliard School of Music. Ultimately Jerry chose to study law at Emory University, earning his Bachelor of Laws in 1963 (he additionally received a Doctor of Law in 1970). He was Atlanta's senior property negotiator through the 1960s, advising the city through a turbulent decade and meeting figures as prominent as Martin Luther King, Jr. After a few years in private practice in Leesburg, Jerry became the first full-time city attorney in Largo in 1974, which soon became the fastest-growing city in Florida. Jerry remained with the city for 24 years, helping acquire the land that became Largo Central Park and generally keeping the city clear of legal trouble. (Frivolous lawsuits against the city were not unknown: When one landlord accused a "city raccoon" of having bit a tenant, Jerry asked if the raccoon had worn a sign declaring it city property.) Largo's City Manager called Jerry's retirement in March of 1998 "an extremely sad day," saying he relied on Jerry's "wisdom, institutional memory, and judgment in every aspect of municipal government." Jerry's marriages brought him much happiness, particularly those that bore him his beloved children. With Nellie Bouwmeester, whom he married in 1958, Jerry raised two children: Tessa McClelland, who died in 2005, and Laura McClelland Erby, 47. With Nona Masterson, whom he married in 1977, Jerry raised a stepson, Sidney Hager, 38; a daughter, Shayna McClelland, 32; and a son, Brett McClelland, 30. Jerry is also survived by five grandchildren. Jerry's first and last romantic partner was Jane Lippett, 82, another Leesburg native, who also survives him. The two dated briefly in the first grade; many decades later, they reunited, remaining together to the moment Jerry passed. Jerry enjoyed regular visits with Jane and her children, Bob Lippett and Terri Bowsky. He also enjoyed the regular company of many childhood friends, trading old stories at weekly dinners in area restaurants. Jerry was a man of diverse interests; in addition to his love for music and theater, he maintained a passion for history. "I've had a very blessed life and didn't miss much," he wrote. Jerry's memorial service will be held on September 23 at 11:30 AM at Lone Oak Cemetery, 306 Thomas Ave., Leesburg FL.