



Joseph J. Wilwerding

He left a legacy of hard work, generosity and humor.

November 12, 1920 – July 2, 2008

EARLING, IA - Joe Wilwerding, 87, was born to John C. and Clara Wilwerding and grew up with eight brothers and sisters. He died of a brain hemorrhage due to a fall.

At age 17, Joe boxed in the Golden Gloves as a middleweight at the Omaha Civic Auditorium. A Harlan businessman, Frank Capral, thought Joe was good and became his boxing sponsor for many exhibitions. Also at this age, he helped with construction of Hwy. 37 east of Earling and Hwy. 59 to Manning. His salary was 50 cents/hour due to his mechanical skills and willingness to work six days a week.

On June 12, 1944, Joe married his sweetheart from Defiance, Mary Ann Blum. Although Mary Ann's father accused Joe of stealing watermelons from the garden, Joe forever maintained his innocence. As a couple, they enjoyed traveling with friends and especially dancing to live Big Band music from the Lawrence Welk Orchestra in California to the Minden Orchestra, with bandleader Jimmy B. They had friends all over the country, but chose to remain in the small SW Iowa community they called home. They were married 61 years. Joe was a devoted husband, father, brother and friend; little children delighted him; he was always willing to give of his time and support. When Mary Ann was in a nursing home for almost 10 years, Joe visited daily, sometimes twice a day.

Always a thrifty saver since living through the Depression, Joe was able to help many people with temporary loans to get them started in life or through a tough time. Dad was always willing to give advice whether practical or financial. Although his wisdom wasn't always appreciated at the time, he usually turned out to be right.

A man of consistency and focus, he learned the car business from his father and grandfather. When he bought his own garage and new car dealership, he worked 12 hour days, six days a week until his mid 40's when in 1964, he sold the garage and returned to the car dealership career. For 30 + years, he helped hundreds of people all over the area find good used cars for a reasonable price.

His business and his hometown of Earling was an all-consuming activity for Joe. He was a businessman, mayor for over 10 years, even being elected once by a write-in vote, a council member, volunteer fire fighter, and tow truck owner/driver. His family recalls many late night phone calls for tow truck service. He was always ready to help. In the late 1940's, as mayor, Joe and the City Council led the drive to get natural gas and in the 1950's, the sewer system in place for future generations. Joe was named 'Businessman of the Year' in 1977.

His sense of humor couldn't be ignored. Once, Dad walked up to a man he had met briefly and said, "Is your name 'Wanted'? I was just in the Post Office and there was a picture of someone who looked just like you." Joe could talk to anyone and always had a "story" to tell. Even when his health was failing, his humor was always near the surface, keeping the nurses and doctors laughing.

Survivors include his three children, Jody Wilwerding (Denise), Gary Wilwerding (Laurie), Jane Bird (Phillip), eight grandchildren, three great-grandchildren, two sisters, Verena (Ken Coenen), Alice (John Stessman), two brothers, Jerold and Ray Wilwerding (Mary) and many nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his wife, Mary Ann (Blum), brothers James and Albert, sisters Marie Stessman (Lawrence/Adolf) and Lucille Blum (Vern).

A Mass of Christian Burial was held on Saturday, July 5, 2008 at St. Joseph Catholic Church in Earling with Rev. Tom Coenen officiating along with accompanist Mary Wilwerding and vocalist Dr. Laura Wilwerding. Pallbearers were Pete Asta, Jeff Casady, Garret Wilwerding, Shaun Wilwerding, Eric Fidler and Luke Wilwerding. Interment in St. Joseph's Cemetery, Earling.

