

The Jovial Advocate

Joshua Stewart “Stew” Sawyer

(ACAS 1969)

1942-2018

Joshua Stewart Sawyer, part of the team that established the first CAS website, died March 31, 2018. He was born March 17, 1942, in Hillsboro, Oregon, to Joshua Stewart Sawyer Jr. and Loree C. Barham. As a youth, Sawyer earned the nickname “Big Stew.” Later, the affable man was simply known as “Stew.” He was his high school’s valedictorian and a National Merit Scholar, and he earned his research and applied mathematics degree from the University of Oregon’s honors college. While there, he was a leader at the Tau Kappa Epsilon fraternity and the Air Force ROTC.

Sawyer started his 45-year career at State Farm and then worked at Firemen’s Fund before finishing his career as vice president and actuary for Wells Fargo Special Risk. He also was board chair of the Independent Insurance Agents & Brokers of California. Sawyer was a member, vice chair and chair of the CAS Committee on Online Services, which developed the first CAS website.

He was committed to ensuring that disabled people could enjoy the outdoors as he did, and so he served on the Outdoors for All Foundation Board of Directors for 19 years. He is survived by his wife, brother, three children and five grandchildren.

The following was written by Stew’s son Steve following his passing on March 31st, 2018.

Mark Phillips, FCAS

Rest in Peace

Joshua Stewart “Stew” Sawyer

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Thoughts on a father...

Our dad passed away Saturday night, March 31st. He fought for days to recover from spinal surgery. He was a fighter. He taught us grit. During his final hours, his family joined him bedside to share loving memories, cry, and say goodbye.

We think about dad. What do we want people to know about Big Stew? Inspired by Hemingway’s six-word story, this is a story of our dad’s life.

“Hello, I’m Stew. You’re my friend.”

When you get six words, you tend to get picky about the words you choose. “I’m your friend,” was an option. It’s close, but it doesn’t quite fit. In a charming way, Stew didn’t really give a stranger the chance to opt in. He more declared it. He touched many, many lives along each path he walked – family, personal, and professional.

Stew was born March 17, 1942, in Hillsboro, Oregon to Joshua Stewart Sawyer, Jr. and Loree C. Barham. Born on St. Patrick’s Day, he loved celebrating his birthday awash in green, offering a playful wink and a smile as he proclaimed his faux Irish ancestry. He grew up in small towns in the aftermath of WWII, spending his early years in Lakeview, Oregon, where his father worked as a civil engineer building new highways for Oregon DOT. Lakeview was a tight community of self-sufficient pioneer-types who helped each other without being asked. A community where my grandma would occasionally find a leg of lamb “accidentally” dropped on her back stoop by a local butcher looking out for my dad, willing to break the ration rules in the wake of the war simply because “a growing boy’s gotta eat.”

Here he learned to hunt and fish, learned to work hard and fix things on his own, learned community and learned how to forge deep friendships. Qualities he carried throughout his lifetime. Qualities that inspired his wife to marriage. Qualities he consistently modeled for his three children and his five grandchildren.

His family moved to The Dalles, Oregon at age nine where his father worked to rebuild roads and rails in preparation for the raising of the mighty Columbia behind the new Dalles Dam. His brother, Gary, was born one year later. He quickly earned a reputation as a master marble player. Using his favorite agate marble, Aggie, he amassed a large collection of marble from the neighbor boys. In his early teens, he loved to compete in basketball, football, and especially baseball. A broken neck from a cliff diving accident on the Columbia curtailed sports as he entered high school. He excelled in school, played leading roles in several high school productions, and earned his Eagle Scout badge before graduating a valedictorian and National Merit Scholar. He spent the summer of 1959 combining his love for people, outdoors, and history to help his parents as guides, giving Oregon Trail tours to dignitaries during the trail centennial celebration.

He attended the University of Oregon, graduating from the Honors College with a degree in Research and Applied Mathematics. He was a leader in the Tau Kappa Epsilon fraternity and a member of the Air Force ROTC before spinal stenosis denied his entry to Air Force Officer Candidate School.

Before leaving U of O, Stew met his lovely bride on a double date. In a moment of “Irish luck,” Stew filled in just to help Truman Conn, a life-long friend from Lakeview. He met Sandra Marie Dornfeld and fell in love. Sandy was studying in Portland, Oregon to become a registered nurse.

Shortly after graduation, Stew and Sandy married and moved to Bloomington, Illinois, where State Farm had recruited him as an actuary. They gave birth to their first child, Scott, in

Bloomington and their daughter, Sue, in Normal, before moving to San Francisco in 1971, where Stew went to work for Fireman's Fund. Their youngest child, Steve, was born that same year in Marin County. He was a leader in actuarial services for Fireman's Fund for 14 years. He balanced work with his love for family, sport, and outdoors. He coached all three of his children, in baseball/softball and took his family on annual summer camping trips to the Sierras and Yosemite Park to tie flies and teach his kids to fish.

In 1985, Stew and Sandy moved to Bellevue, WA. Sandy worked as a nurse briefly at Swedish Medical Center before working at Overlake Hospital for over two decades. In Washington, Stew moved to the agency side of actuarial services, taking the position of Chief Actuary for United Pacific Insurance Company. Stew moved onto Executive Director of Market Security nationally for Wells Fargo Insurance Services and ended his career as Vice President and Actuary for Wells Fargo Special Risk.

Blending his love of math and his strong sense of service, Stew became involved in the Western Association of Insurance Brokers (WAIB). In 2005, WAIB and the Independent Insurance Agents & Brokers of California (IIABC) combined to form IBA West (currently IIABCAL). Over his many years of involvement with these associations, Stew served in every role on the executive board and served as chair of the association's for-profit service corporation.

In 2010, Stew retired after contributing 45 years to the field of actuarial science in the insurance industry. He continued in his love of people and math to serve clients as an independent actuarial consultant and expert witness. He was a member of the American Academy of Actuaries and an Associate of the Casualty and Actuarial Society.

Stew loved the outdoors. His knowledge of flora, fauna, and geology bordered on encyclopedic. He loved to share prolifically with everyone willing to listen. Stew brought his love for outdoors and his desire to serve to the Skiforall Foundation in 1990. The foundation (today called Outdoors For All) enriches the lives of children and adults with disabilities through outdoor recreation, a mission aligned perfectly with Stew's passions. He served as a board member from 1990 to 2009, including Board Chair from 1991 to 1997. When Stew started with Skiforall, the foundation made it possible for hundreds of people to experience the outdoors through adaptive skiing. During his leadership on the board, the foundation thrived. Today, Outdoors For All serves a record 2,500 children and adults with disabilities with the help of nearly 700 volunteers. Adaptive skiing has expanded to include downhill skiing, cross country skiing, snowboarding, snowshoeing, kayaking, rock climbing, cycling, day camps, custom group events, excursions, hiking, and yoga. Children as young as age five and adults of all ages are active through the work of the foundation.

This foundation was very near and dear to his heart. He considered it a lifetime crowning achievement. In July 2009, shortly after his resignation from the board, Stew was elected to the Outdoors For All Foundation Emeritus Board of Directors, an honor earned only by a select few past board members.

Family and friends will gather for a Celebration of Life on Sunday, May 6 from 1 to 4 pm at the Pierce County Environmental Services Building, 9850 64th Street W, University Place, WA.

In lieu of flowers, the family encourages memorial contributions to the Outdoors For All Foundation, (<https://outdoorsforall.org>). The Foundation is in the process of setting up a special page on its website for contributions in Stewart Sawyer's memory. In the meantime you can go to their giving section and gift a contribution in Stew's name.

For more information or to confirm that you plan to attend the Celebration of Life, please contact Steve Sawyer at 206.455.0020 or email sawyer.s@portseattle.org.

Sincerely,

Steve Sawyer