



John S. Ungvarsky Jr

August 6, 1927 - January 21, 2023

Eulogies and Mass will be live streamed on the following link: <https://www.vievwlogies.net/givnish/vsr6kdmHX?pin=483412>

This obituary of John S. Ungvarsky Jr was written as a loving tribute for his grandchildren, great grandchildren, and future family generations. It is hoped that by reading John's life story and the many stories that John told, that they will get to know the man that he was, and that they may learn a little bit from his wisdom.

John Ungvarsky Jr, 95, of Cinnaminson, NJ, passed away peacefully on January 21, 2023. Devoted husband to Joan Ungvarsky (nee Konopinski) for 64 years. Dear father to John (Jay) Ungvarsky (Anne Malone) of Cinnaminson NJ, Robert Ungvarsky (Tonya) of Orlando FL, June Ungvarsky Neuman (Clint) of New Smyrna Beach FL. Grandfather to Brittany Ungvarsky, Austin Neuman (Kayla), Rachel Ungvarsky O'Brien (Ian), Ashley Ungvarsky, Michael Ungvarsky, Christian Neuman, Thomas Ungvarsky, Brendan Neuman, Polina Ungvarsky, Julia Ungvarsky. Great grandfather to Annabelle Neuman.

Born on August 6, 1927 in Wilkes-Barre PA, John was the third of seven children born to the late John Sr. and Emily (Pavco) Ungvarsky. Siblings include the late Edward (late Florence) of Loyalville PA, the late Bernadine Price (late Walter) of Wilkes-Barre PA, Marion O'Neil (late Jerry) of Wilmington

DE, Emily Carone (Joe) of Acra NY, the late Elizabeth (Betsy) Ungvarsky of Weston VT and the late Carl Ungvarsky (Dorothy) of Mountain Top PA. John's Funeral Mass will take place at 10:30am at St. Charles Borromeo of Cinnaminson. Entombment and military honor will take place at Lakeview Memorial Park in Cinnaminson. In lieu of flowers, donations in John's name may be made to The Salvation Army in Camden NJ where John volunteered during his retirement.

<https://give.salvationarmy.org/give/189351/#!/donation/checkout>

John grew up in an ethnic Slovak neighborhood in Wilkes-Barre PA. His grandparents had emigrated to the U.S. from Slovakia in Eastern Europe when they were very young in the 1890's. They married in 1898. Their marriage would begin a family tree of hundreds. Their wedding photo hung in the family home. It actually looked quite sad as he was sitting in a chair and she was wearing a black dress standing behind him. Neither was smiling. The real story behind it was that it had poured rain on their wedding day and her beautiful wedding dress was ruined. The photo was taken the next day and the only other dress that she owned was black. It was common not to smile and to hold a stiff pose with the old-fashioned cameras, so she looked much older than her 18 years.

The houses in the neighborhood were only one room wide because the city taxes were based on how wide the lot was. So everyone built their houses one room wide and very deep. Many were three stories high. Some had a narrow driveway leading to the backyard where they might have a garage. All had basements with rooms at the front of the house called coal bins. Where basement windows would normally be at the front of the house were hatches. A coal delivery truck would open the hatch, insert a chute and shovel coal from the truck down the chute to fill up the house's coal bins. Most houses were heated with a giant kitchen coal burning stove, even until the 1970's. The kids chores always included bringing buckets of coal up from the

basement to feed the stove, and taking buckets of ashes outside to dump somewhere.

John's grandparents lived outside of town. His grandmother used to walk 4-5 miles each way to go to the Slovak Catholic Church that the families had all donated to build. So John's grandfather got his friends together and they built a house for his grandmother at 450 Madison Street which was only a few houses away from the church. It was similar to the Amish where families would help each other build houses. Many of the men were in the building trades. Some of the plaster work was beautiful, but some of the framing wasn't too square. Many worked long hours six days a week so they didn't have time for perfection.

John was born and raised in the house at 450 Madison Street. It was a duplex and his grandparents lived in the connecting half at 448 Madison Street. When John was born in 1927, his father was a 28 year old thriving entrepreneur who owned three retail locations and employed some of his cousins. He built it all from scratch. One brilliant idea that he had was to buy train car loads of chickens from the Midwest. They came 4-5 chickens per crate. He hired a man to ride on the train to feed and water them. He would put an ad in the newspaper telling people in Wilkes-Barre where and when the train was arriving. He would sell out in a few hours. There were no refrigerators, only ice boxes if a house had one. So people were used to butchering their own chickens. And kids were used to the chore of plucking the feathers out. Years later John's grandmother told him that his father's business was doing so well that he made enough money in a month to build a house.

In 1929 when John was two years old the U.S. Stock Market Crashed! John's father John Sr. was 30 years old and his mother Emily was only 28. They

already had four children, soon to be seven children. Their business disintegrated. No one who owed them money ever paid them. People lost their jobs. Previous customers now had no money to buy anything. John actually spent twenty years in small bits paying everyone back that he owed any money to, every cent.

In an instant the family's life in the 1930's went from success to simply survival. John Sr. managed to find a job in the local coal mine digging coal on his knees for 6 days a week to put food on the family table. Emily miraculously stretched whatever food they could afford to feed nine people. They had a chicken coup in the garage attic for fresh eggs. John Sr. was handy and eventually was in charge of repairing the mining equipment. He had a key cutting machine in his basement and made money making keys for people. The corner bars all had slot machines that John Sr. would repair. He also was paid by the bar owners to adjust the machines to pay out more early in the week and less on Fridays. If people put a few coins in and won, they were likely to come back on Friday when they were paid and put more money in and lose.

All of the kids tried to do whatever small jobs they could find to help the family. John eventually had 2-3 newspaper routes as a boy. His father would take him early in the morning when it was still dark to pick up his newspapers. There was a small bowling alley in the basement of the school. John would work as a pin setter. Basically a little kid who would sit up above the pins and try not to get hit, and then jump down and clear or setup the pins for the next ball to be rolled. He said it was crazy when a big guy was bowling he had to pull himself up as high as he could to not get hit when the pins would splatter.

The mines would dump scrap rocks that they had to remove to get to the pure coal. There were piles of it along the side of many local roads. It contained too little coal but the siblings would walk along every chance that they could get

and pick bits of coal out of the rock to bring home in their pockets to heat the house and cook with. Ironically, many decades later John's youngest brother Carl was part of an engineering project to extract the coal while cleaning up the eyesore of those miles and miles of coal rock along the side of the roads.

The rear of their duplex at 450 Madison Street was walled off to create another 2-room unit to rent to provide some additional family income. So the family of nine lived in a house with four rooms, 2 up, 2 down. Upstairs there was a large bedroom with a big bed where Emily slept with her four daughters, and a small front bedroom where John slept in a bed with his two brothers. John Sr. slept on the sofa in the small front room downstairs. They all ate together at a big round table in the kitchen. The bathroom was in the basement with a toilet and sink. And there was a big white tub where they all took baths at least once a week. And of course, the coal bins were in the front of the basement.

Despite the financial hardships there wasn't a closer family. There are so many stories of them loving and respecting each other. They all learned from the examples set by their father John Sr. and their mother Emily.

They lived in a house in a neighborhood full of Slovak families. Their close cousins the Baloga's lived right across the street. The church was a couple houses away and in the other direction was Bonka's, the neighborhood corner bar. There was a small grocery shop down the street.

John liked to tell the story about how they were all around the dinner table and his mother had made mashed potatoes. One of the kids waited until their parents were distracted and used a spoon to flick a little ball of mashed potatoes up where it stuck on the high plastered ceiling. All the siblings laughed and the parents didn't know why. Then the kids took turns distracting their parents until the ceiling had at least 7 balls of mashed potatoes stuck to

it. Those seven siblings had a lifelong bond. They loved each other so much and helped each other in so many ways throughout their lives.

When he was a little kid, John's father would get home from the mines and would send John down the street to Bonka's to get him a growler of beer. A growler is a jug that holds a quart of beer. John would go into Bonka's and order. The bartender always asked him if he was 21. John would reply "Yes" and he would be on his way home with beer for his father.

John was born ambidextrous like two of his sisters, one of his own children and several of his grandchildren. When John attempted to write with his left hand, the nuns at his school would whack his left hand with a ruler to make him use his right hand. It was insane but no one would ever question the nuns who taught in the school.

John wasn't a scholar. He was a happy outgoing mischievous boy. If you got in trouble with the nuns at school or anywhere, there was no pleading your case. You embarrassed your family and you were likely to get spanked with hand or belt. John had stories of hiding behind a big pickle barrel behind the store down the street while the vigilantes as he called them were out searching for him. One of the downsides of living in a close ethnic neighborhood was that everyone knew you and they'd send everyone out looking for you if you had done something wrong.

Apparently, this happened frequently enough that John developed several strategies. He would run to his grandmother who lived in the other half of the duplex. She would bring him home and he would hide behind her skirt while his father sometimes tried to reach around and grab him. She was a petite woman who would shake her finger at his father and say in Slovak "Don't you touch him!" Also, it was well known that John Sr. would never spank a kid who

was praying. So, John would run into the house and up the stairs as fast as he could with his father chasing after him. John would hit his knees in front of his bed and pray and pray for as long as it took for his father to cool off. John often told the story of how his father cut him off from making it to his bedroom so he dove under his mother's big bed. His father would push the bed to one side and then the other as John was scrambling to stay under, and his father was trying to grab an arm or a leg to pull him out.

One day John retrieved a couple of eggs from the chicken coup and put them in his pocket to take home. He stopped by the school yard and joined a couple of boys playing a game that they had invented. The flagpole had a giant angled concrete base that they would bounce a ball against to play. In the middle of the game a girl came and leaned against the concrete base and spread her pretty skirt out over it to prevent the boys from playing. As John told the story this was a particularly annoying girl from school. The boys pleaded with her to move and she refused. John finally pulled an egg from his pocket and said "If you don't move, I'll hit you with this egg." She replied "I DARE YOU!" Well John threw the egg, it splattered in the middle of her favorite skirt, the girl ran home screaming, and John was soon hiding behind the pickle barrel.

When John was growing up there was already an older kid with the same name in the neighborhood group of kids. So somehow John got the nickname that's pronounced "Tone Eye". To this day if you are trying to explain which branch of the family you are from in that neighborhood, you just say "Tone Eye" and everyone understands.

John loved to sing and was in a glee club growing up. He and his older sister Bernadine often performed in shows when they were kids. John grew up during the Big Band era and he often went to see bands like Tommy Dorsey perform in Wilkes-Barre or Scranton.

John graduated from Sacred Heart Elementary School in Wilkes-Barre PA and attended the former James M. Coughlin High School in Wilkes-Barre until age 15 when he left school to work to help to support the family of nine during World War II. John drove a beer delivery truck for the local Gibbons Brewery. John attempted to join all of the branches of the military with his father's promise to sign that he was 18 years old. He failed all of the physicals when military doctors detected a heart murmur. The first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan on John's 18th birthday and WW2 was soon over.

The real story was that John got a summer job at Gibbons Brewery driving the beer truck when he was 15. There was a huge labor shortage in 1942 with the war going on. John said he was older, and the guy at the brewery winked and hired him. He was tall and strong enough to do the job. Every Friday John would hand his entire pay to his mother for the family and she would hand him back some pocket change. John was actually making more money driving the beer truck than his father was bringing home from the mines.

When summer ended his father pressured John to quit high school and drive the beer truck full time because the income was precious to the family. John was on the football team (he ran track in the Springs). He wanted to stay in high school. Things got so heated that John ran away from home and went to New York City with a little money that his mother gave him. A few weeks later his father told the family to leave the front door unlocked because my son is coming home tonight. He had had a premonition, and he was right. John came home and went back to high school, only to find out that he missed too many school days to be eligible to play football. He was disillusioned and ended up quitting school and driving the beer truck full time.

Decades later John would often say that when he was in his teens and 20's, he thought that his father was really dumb. But that by the time that he was in

his 30's and 40's he couldn't believe how much smarter his father had gotten.

John had many stories from his late teens and early twenties. A big hospital was only a few blocks away. There were a lot of young single nurses working there. John found out what time the nursing shifts changed. He went there with the idea that if he could meet just one nurse he could ask her if she had any friends. Then he and his friends would get to know all of the nurses and be set up for dates. It worked!

One time John and his buddy asked a couple of nurses out on a double date. When they got there they discovered that both guys were broke and had intended to borrow money from the other guy for the date. There were no credit cards back then. Everything was paid for with cash. The guys were screwed and had to scramble. John didn't remember how they got out of it, only the terror when the two guys realized that they had no money.

The siblings had a midnight curfew. Their Dad slept on the sofa in the front room where the tall grandfather clock was. When the door would open, it would wake him up and he would check the clock to see if they were in before midnight. Well John thought that he could stay out as late as he wanted because he would sneak in through the kitchen window, quietly turn back the grandfather clock to before midnight and then go back out the window and in through the front door. His father would wake up, see that the clock said that it was before midnight and then go back to sleep. Well one day his sisters played a joke on John. They dressed the ironing board up as a person with a hat and coat right by the kitchen window. John came in through the window, thought it was a burglar, threw a punch that set it flying across the kitchen and woke up the whole house!

At age 23, John was drafted for the Korean War. He went to the physical. Sure

enough as each guy came out, they had John stand on one side of the room and all of the other guys on the other side of the room. John was sure that he failed the physical, but it turned out that all of the other guys had failed and he was the only one who passed. Somehow his heart murmur was gone forever!

John entered the U.S. Army as a Private in November 1950. Usually, draftees from an area are sent to train together. But John was sent to train with a new unit in Kentucky. He made lifelong friends there. John attended annual Army reunions in Kentucky until 2004 when he was 77 years old. The reunions were fascinating. It was a group of guys who had been like brothers for several years of their lives when they were around 18-22 years old. Then they went on to lead separate lives. For these reunions they would get together at the local VFW and bring old uniforms and Army souvenirs that they spread out on tables to view. They were mostly retired. They had lived widely varied lives from politicians, lawyers, laborers, a school custodian, etc. But absolutely none of that part of their lives mattered, when they were together it was like they were 18 year old buddies in Army training.

John credited the Army for changing his life. In the 60's he took his son with him to visit Gibbons Brewery. All of the people who worked there had worked with him in the 40's. John said that he might still be working at Gibbons, if it wasn't for the Army showing him the world and providing him with opportunities and challenges.

John did well on an Army IQ test and he was encouraged to finish high school in the Army which he did. He was promoted to Sergeant and selected to attend the Signal Corps Officer's Candidate School. John graduated in July 1952 and was promoted to 2nd Lieutenant. He was made a Company Commander responsible for 325 men. In February 1953 he was sent to Korea.

In John's own words... "When Captain Krauss told his 11 Second Lieutenants

that they would draw straws to determine who would be responsible for all company equipment at 16 locations as far as 60 miles away I volunteered for the job. Since I was a company commander responsible for equipment, I had the experience to do the job. When I left the company 10 months later, there were no shortages.” It was the most difficult job to be assigned. Not only a large number of locations but all travel between them was by jeep over dirt roads.

John had many fond memories of Korea and the Korean people. Many years later some of his grandchildren received college scholarships from a South Korean foundation created to honor U.S. service men who had served in Korea during the war.

When John was a Sergeant, they often had men go AWOL. John understood, he was empathetic. He said they were mostly 18-year-old kids who had never been away from home. They were always caught, brought back and given 30 days labor. They were given tasks like painting barracks which they usually did poorly like slopping paint on windows, etc. because they were just putting in time. John told them that if they did a great job, he would cut a week off their sentences. The officers noticed that John’s barracks were beautifully painted while the others were a mess. John always treated people with respect.

Some of his positive actions actually got John in hot water with the old timer Sergeants who wanted things to keep being done as before. They didn’t like him getting attention for trying to improve things.

When John was put in charge of pay, he thought that it was an inefficient system. Hundreds of soldiers had to wait in line for many hours to get paid one at a time. John instituted a system where the individual pays were counted out ahead of time so that hundreds of soldiers were paid in just

twenty minutes. He said that many soldiers who had been drafted from all parts of the country were illiterate. Some would be drawing an X to sign their names for their pay. John would grab a pen and say put your hand on top of my hand, and then he would sign their name.

When John was promoted to 2nd Lieutenant and put in charge of company with hundreds of men, John called all of the Sergeants under him to a meeting. He said to them "I know that I am in over my head. I am hoping that you guys will help me out by showing me the ropes," And they did.

Hearing John's stories from Korea was a lot like watching the TV show M*A*S*H which he loved. Many of his stories sound like the character Radar O'Reilly. John was a Company Commander in charge of equipment at 16 locations so he was always wheeling and dealing.

Most of the area was huts and tents but John managed to have an Officers Club built out of cinder block. He said that as the road turned it was shock to new comers to see this beautiful building on a hill. The commanding officer asked John what might be done to help the morale of the troops. John said that there really weren't that many officers at the location so why not open the Officers Club to all of the enlisted troops. It was a big hit among the men!

John said that they all worked hard but they still had fun in Korea. When a new officer would report for duty they would often come in acting very stiff and formal. When a new officer would put their hand out to shake hands, they'd put a beer in his hand!

This was a lot like the atmosphere in the neighborhood in Wilkes-Barre. John's cousin Joe Baloga often installed beer taps out of the side of old refrigerators in their family's houses. Besides delivering to bars, John

delivered kegs of beer to some of his relative's houses. Big groups would go caroling around the neighborhood at Christmas and the houses that had their own kegs were never missed! Everyone would just walk around and knock on family doors to stop by. No one phoned ahead. You just knocked on a door and you'd be welcomed inside for food and drink. Everyone seemed to end up at John's cousins, Sally & Bernie Bologna's house. The rule there was that when the pitcher was empty it was the job of the youngest person in the room to go down in the basement where the keg was and refill the pitcher. It started with the little kids who loved the job. But as the night went on the person refilling the pitcher might be 45-50 years old.

One day John was traveling by jeep between the 16 locations that he managed in Korea. He saw some Korean kids so he stopped the jeep and handed out some candy that he had with him. He continued driving to the other locations. When he got back to the gate at the base where he was stationed, that whole gang of kids and more were waiting for him. He said that the Koreans were very smart. From the markings on his jeep the kids knew exactly where they could find him, hoping for more candy!

The Army has this crazy rule that if someone signs out equipment and doesn't return it, that person has to pay for it out of their own pay. The Army would string up hundreds of listening devices all over the woods in an attempt to hear the enemy approaching. A soldier came to John distraught because no matter how much they searched they could not find every device that they had deployed over many miles of woods. It would personally crush him financially if the Army billed him for the lost equipment. John had compassion for him. He found a way to list the equipment as destroyed in battle so that the soldier was off the hook.

In John's own words... "In October 1953 I received a letter from my sister Bernadine in Philadelphia letting me know that LaSalle College was creating a

Korean Veterans Class starting February 1, 1954. I applied and was accepted. My problem: I was due for Discharge from the Service on January 31, 1954, the day before classes started in Philadelphia. Since the war was over, I asked for an early release to attend college and it was granted. In December 1953 I left for Inchon, Korea to await a homebound ship. My concern- would I get home in time to attend college classes?

After a few days, an Air Force Captain came to see me, the Air Force was based next to the shipping docks. The Captain probably learned about my responsibility for all company property. He asked if I would help to get his Company Property Books in order. I obliged and got the job done.

The Air Force Captain needed a Courier to deliver sealed mail bags to Tokyo, Japan. I became the Courier. From there he arranged for me to fly home. (rather than take a troop ship that would have taken weeks to travel)”

The funny thing about this story was that it didn't occur to John that the Air Force Captain set up this Courier job and flight home as a reward to him for fixing his books. John had just been doing a stranger a favor. And he thought it was just good luck when they needed a Courier. John was always willing to lend a helping hand, never looking for anything in return.

John was honorably discharged from active duty on December 31, 1953. (He served in the U.S. Army Reserves for another 18 months.)

John immediately went to live with his sister Bernadine and her husband Walt in their small row home in Northeast Philadelphia. He went to college full time while working as many as three jobs at a time. He was waiting tables at different places and shining shoes at a country club. He graduated in January 1958 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Industrial Management.

John met the love his life on a double date for New Year's Eve 1956, when Joan came on the date with his best friend. Joan assumed that he was trying

to break up with the girl that he brought to New Year's Eve when John waited until March to ask her out. Joan had gone to Penn State where guys apparently asked girls out earlier in the week for the weekend, not a day or two before which was somehow considered rude. So she turned him down. Yet John was relentless and they finally went on their first date on St Patrick's Day 1957. After more dates, in May, John asked Joan to a Formal dance at LaSalle where he asked her to go steady.

During that Summer of 1957, Joan's mother Sophie from Nanticoke PA, near Wilkes-Barre visiting Joan at her 3-story walkup apartment on Spruce Street in Philadelphia. (Joan worked as a dietician at a Philadelphia hospital). They had picked Sophie up at the bus station. As Joan and Sophie walked up the building stairs, John was in the rear carrying Sophie's luggage. Suddenly Sophie stopped on the stairs, turned to John and asked..."Do you hunt?" John responded "No." Sophie continued, "Do you fish?" "No" John replied. Sophie exclaimed "Good! I want you for a son-in-law!"

Sophie had a great sense of humor but she was actually trying to scare John off. Joan's family was Polish and John's family was Slovak. It's comical looking from the outside because the Polish and Slovak languages and foods are very similar. Yet to them they are very different. Sophie wanted Joan to find a nice Polish boy! But she still learned to love John!

Sophie was funny. When Joan and John were at their family homes for the Christmas holidays, they still saw each other because they only lived 8 miles apart. Joan & John would be sitting on her family room sofa. When Sophie thought it was late and time to wrap up their date, she would stand at the top of the stairs and set off a hand held alarm clock. She would do it every minute or two until John got the hint and left!

Joan & John announced their engagement during Christmas 1957. The next week when they were back in Philadelphia, John had a jeweler meet them at Joan's apartment with loose diamonds for Joan to pick out a stone for her engagement ring. At that time there was no diamond marketing to convince guys that they had to spend 3-4 months salary and there wasn't much buying on credit. John told the jeweler what he planned to spend and the jeweler showed up with what Joan described later as a few tiny specks. Joan didn't say much but John could see the disappointment on her face. John adjusted his budget had the jeweler return with some better options. Joan was happy. John lived his life to try to make his wife happy. He loved her so much.

Joan & John were married on the Fourth of July, 1958. It was a Friday and all of their family and friends had off from work. Plus the timing allowed them to honeymoon in Bermuda the following week. John joked that he promised Joan fireworks every year on their anniversary. For many decades the two of them would drive to the Jersey Shore on the 4th to celebrate by eating dinner together and taking in the fireworks!

Joan was late for her own wedding. John never said if he was nervous at the church thinking that she might not show up. Joan was ready at her mother's house. Her uncle was supposed to pick her up to drive her to the church. But he was playing cards with his buddies and lost track of time. There weren't any cell phones at the time, and no one knew where he was.

There were no credit cards at the time. John had always paid cash for everything. He had no credit history so he was unable to borrow money from a bank for their honeymoon in Bermuda. One of his brothers-in-law loaned him what he needed.

Newlyweds Joan & John rented a row home on Miriam Road in Northeast Philadelphia not far from his sister Bernadine and her husband Walt. John had

worked for SmithKline & French Laboratories at 1500 Spring Garden Street in Philadelphia since about 1956. It was a Friday in June 1959. He was at work when Joan called to say that her water broke and she was in labor. He tried to rush home on the subway but when labor started getting worse, Joan called a cab to get to Frankford Hospital. Joan said the poor cab driver had a terrified look when he saw that she was in labor and rushed to the hospital out of fear that she would give birth in his cab. Joan gave birth to their first child, a boy. They went back and forth between naming him John or Jay. They were first time parents and the picking a name thing must have confused them. So, they officially named him John, but called him Jay since the day that he was born.

In 1962 Joan & John bought a brand new house across the Delaware River in Cinnaminson, NJ. Joan & John have lived in Cinnaminson for 60 years. Their son Rob was born in 1963 and their daughter June was born in 1967.

The proud parents were involved in their kids lives and activities. John was a Phillies fan his entire life but never played organized baseball. In the 1970's when the Sacred Heart School Little League needed coaches John volunteered. Then he quickly went to the library to find books on how to coach little league baseball. John ended up coaching the Angels little league team over nine years spanning his two boys Jay and Rob's playing days.

John's little league coaching differed from the more experienced fathers. Usually teams played their 9 best players so there were often 4-5 kids who mostly road the bench. John didn't believe in that. He had a system where every kid played a minimum number of innings in every game. Kids loved playing for the Angels because everyone actually played. Eventually they really didn't have weak players. Everyone had experience and confidence. It didn't matter which kid got up to hit with two outs and the bases loaded, that kid would get a hit.

In 1972 the Angels were so good that the league got the idea to not have a normal All-Star Game with two teams. Instead, they created an All-Star team from the best players from all of the other teams in the league. For the All-Star game, that team played the Angels. And the Angels crushed them!

John also went out to the local Pennsauken Mart and bought cases of non-brand name soda. He brought a cooler to each game so that each player could have a soda after the game as a reward. This was decades before there was such a thing as a designated snack person. John also attracted other Dad's to be assistant coaches. At the end of the season they took the team to a local ice cream place called Buxton's. It all promoted morale and teamwork. Many players from those nine years of little league teams still live in the area and say hello to their coach whenever they run into him.

In the 1960's John and three buddies from Northeast Philadelphia had season tickets for the Philadelphia Eagles. At that time the Eagles played at Franklin Field on the University of Pennsylvania campus. Their seats were in the end zone stands just under the overhang so they wouldn't get soaked if it rained. The guys took turns staying home and allowing the other guys to take their sons to a game. John would take Jay who was 8 years old over the Tacony Palmyra Bridge into Northeast Philly to meet his buddy along with his son. It was a real adventure because they all took the commuter train into Philadelphia for the game. The Eagles best wide receiver was Ben Hawkins whose father sat right behind them.

John wasn't experienced like his father in repairing and building things. But he never avoided a challenge. He would often get books from the library or ask an experienced neighbor for advice. They bought an above ground pool for the backyard. John got estimates to build a deck halfway around it. They were

super expensive because they were expecting 30%-40% waste after cutting the expensive redwood. John thought that was crazy so he spent most of a day calculating by hand how much wood to buy and of what lengths. John and his son Jay built the deck with advice from his neighbor, and the waste was less than 1%. The two of them spent a couple months one summer on nights after dinner and on weekends building the deck board by board. They often listened to Phillies games on a small portable radio while they worked. John often took his kids to Phillies games.

In Cinnaminson Joan & John met their lifelong friends, three other couples, the Christopolis's, Flaer's and Dwyer's. The four couples really enjoyed each other's company. They were in a Thursday night bowling league, spent holidays together and to their children's horror went out disco dancing together in the 70's. The men in leisure suits, the women in disco outfits. Some of their kids may still be scarred for life. The four couples went on vacations together. Joan & John foolishly went on a two-week cruise with their friends and left their two boys home alone when their oldest was in high school. What were they thinking?

John had a 30-year career at SmithKline. He had many business positions in Marketing and Management. His work was well respected. Several times the business reorganized and did away with his position but they didn't want to lose John so the company always found him another role. John spent many years in the Purchasing Department. He bought millions of dollars worth of paper and cardboard. Contaq cold medicine was the company's most well-known product at the time. So when John's kids were asked what he did for a living they would say that he buys the boxes that Contaq comes in.

There were perks to having a Purchasing job for a big company. John was often invited to play golf at very nice golf courses including once a year at Pine Valley, the #1 course in the country. John talked to his kids about

situations where people tried to bribe him and how to gracefully stay clear of those.

John also talked about how important it was to treat everyone with respect at all times. He said that everyone will be nice to you when you are spending millions of dollars and you have leverage over them. But that means nothing if the tables are turned. One time John desperately needed to find a certain kind of gum guaiac for a manufacturing process that would be forced to shut down if he could not find it. It wasn't expensive, maybe \$250, but it was a natural product from the Amazon rainforest in South America. So it was scarce, difficult to find. John asked several vendors to drop everything and search the world to find it for him and they did. John said that they never would have done so for such a small purchase if he hadn't treated them with respect for years. After John had changed jobs with the company and later retired, he counted several of those vendors among his best friends who still invited him to lunch or to play golf.

John spent most of his years at SmithKline in the Diagnostics division as the Manufacturing Manager and near the end of his career as the Vice President of Manufacturing Operations for SmithKline Diagnostics. Their biggest product was the Hemoccult test which could be ran in a doctor's office to early detect colon cancer.

Dr Victor Iacocca PhD was John's close friend and coworker in Diagnostics. Dr I. was a brilliant microbiologist who had previously taught at Hahnemann Medical School in Philadelphia. His cousin was the famous automotive executive at Ford and Chrysler, Lee Iacocca. Victor and Lee were very close. The rest of the Iacocca family were very successful in the restaurant business. John used to tease Victor that he was the black sheep of the family because he only had a PhD. Victor was also a Vice President. When John was 92 and his health prevented him from driving any longer, he would loudly complain

that he should be able to drive because his friend Victor was still driving at age 99.

John anguished a bit over his decision but he took an early retirement package in 1986 at age 59. Later he was so happy that he did because he got the best healthcare package that they offered retirees. Friends who retired later received lesser healthcare. SmithKline continued to hire John back as a consultant for the next three years. Then he went to work for Enzymatics in Horsham PA, a startup founded by his former boss who was the CEO. From 1989-1994, John was their Manufacturing Operations Advisor and Special Consultant to the CEO. John often said that his varied military and business career experience really helped with the challenges of a smaller startup company. He got a chance to really use everything that he had learned over four decades.

The CEO recently wrote about John... "Boy did we ever lean on John's expertise! He was a huge expert resource- that few start-ups can rarely afford. I will forever remember John. You cannot imagine how often John's name comes up in conversation when I speak of my SmithKline/Enzymatics days. I have many cherished memories. John was ALWAYS so dependable and committed to never disappoint. His work ethic was amazing and he was always there when you needed him and the epitome of the loyal team player. I never had to worry about manufacturing glitches because John always had a PlanA and a PlanB. My wife and I frequently think of John and his enthusiastic support of others, especially like the Penn State Christmas nonprofit work that he & Joan supported for so many years. I am a better person for having John as my friend."

After John actually retired in 1995, he became the Treasurer of the South Jersey Chapter of the Penn State Alumni Association. Which sounds crazy

because he didn't attend Penn State. But John was a diehard Penn State Football Fan and Joan was a Penn State Alum so the association accepted them both.

When John was growing up his father always told him that if he ever gets a chance to help a charity, make it the Salvation Army because they were the only ones who never turned anyone away during the PSU Alumni Treasurer he got a call from the Salvation Army in Camden NJ asking for help. They wanted to raise money to purchase a computer so that local neighborhood kids could use it for their homework after school. John rallied the organization who helped to buy many study computers over subsequent years.

The Salvation Army wanted to have a small Christmas party for maybe 4-5 neighborhood kids. They told John the kid's sizes and they all received Penn State sweatshirts as a Christmas gift. The party was rewarding. John & Joan noticed the kids stuffing extra food into their pockets. When asked they said that they had siblings at home who weren't invited to the party who would enjoy the food. Their families were very poor. That was a sad inspiration for Joan & John. They spoke with the Salvation Army about making the party larger to benefit more neighborhood kids. The party got larger each year, quickly outgrowing the Salvation Army location itself so it was moved to a local church with a large youth group that wanted to help. The event grew larger and even obtained some corporate sponsors.

One year the party was held for 85 children from Camden at the church/school cafeteria. They found buses to transport the kids from the Salvation Army. They had a Christmas tree with the wrapped Penn State sweatshirts under it. And a volunteer who did a great job as Santa. They served a big meal with Christmas treats.

There was a bicycle next to the tree. Santa announced that they were going to

raffle off the bicycle to a lucky kid. They passed around a bucket of folded pieces of paper. The kids were told not to unfold them. They each had a number on them. They were going to announce the winning number, the kids would unfold their paper and whoever had the winning number was supposed to jump up and down. Santa announced the winning number was 37. Suddenly there were 85 kids jumping up and down because they all had number 37. Santa said "Oh my, what will we do?" All of a sudden the doors opened and the church youth group walked in with 84 more bicycles! Tears were streaming down every face in the room. These were kids who had difficulty dreaming of ever owning their own bicycle, and they were all going to take one home.

Joan & John worked on other local charitable projects over the years. In 2011 the alumni chapter announced a scholarship fund in John's name. Within a few years it gained enough donations to become an officially endowed Penn State scholarship fund. Every year high school seniors who intend to attend Penn State apply for this scholarship.

John enjoyed being part of the team who counted the offering money on Sundays after the Masses. He and Joan also worked at the St Charles Carnival every year counting the money as it came in. They loved the camaraderie of the group.

John was so proud of his three kids and 10 grandchildren. He went to every possible sporting event, after school event and every activity that they had. He always wore a shirt with a pocket where he carried his cell phone. He would be out and about every day. He'd call from the supermarket asking if anyone needed anything. He'd drop everything to take a grandkid to practice or pick them up from somewhere. The grandkids got smart and would call Grandpa's cell phone asking if he felt like going to Jersey Mike's with them.

John was out driving, sometimes running 4-5 errands a day until he was almost 92 years old. He enjoyed taking Joan out for breakfast, or dinner. They had their favorite places where John knew everyone by name, and they all knew him.

After John turned 90, Joan started being concerned because he was repeating himself often. John went to a Neurologist to be tested. The Neurologist said that John scored 29 out of 30 on a test. He said the score was incredible because 30 or 40 year olds off the street usually score about 23-24. But John's short term memory loss was the beginning of Alzheimer's disease.

John's humor was legendary. In 2019 on the day that he was leaving a stint in a rehab facility, some of the staff came into his room to wish him well. His physical therapist, an attractive woman in her 30's, hugged him and said "Goodbye John. I'm going to miss you!" John instantly looked crushed and said, "What do you mean "goodbye"? I thought that we were running off together!" He had a twinkle in his eye as he glanced at his wife sitting 8 feet away. Joan just rolled her eyes. She was very good at that because John gave her a lot of practice during their 65+ years together.

An absolutely wonderful thing about memory loss is that sometimes you get to experience your favorite things for the first time, again and again. When Jay would drive John to a doctor's appointment, they would go through the McDonald's drive thru for Egg McMuffins. John would bite into his and exclaim "This is a great sandwich! What do they call it?" After that, the two of them went exploring often when they were driving to/from doctor's appointments so that John could experience his "first" cheesesteak, "first" Arby's chicken sandwich, "first" slice of his favorite pizza. It was pure joy to see John so happy with his first bite.

John's short-term memory gradually got worse. Later his long-term memory began to fail as well. In December 2021, John's physical health and his memory issues suddenly forced him to have to leave his home with Joan. One morning he literally couldn't sit up and get himself out of bed. He went to the hospital, and then to a series of facilities over the next 13 months. But he never slept at home again.

John's memory would reset every 10-15 minutes or so. It was like living the TV show Quantum Leap over and over. It felt like he was suddenly appearing in a new place that he didn't recognize. He would be in his room but think that it was someone else's room. He wouldn't remember that one door was to his bathroom and another door was his closet. It had to be a little scary for John. He didn't want to start poking around, thinking that it was someone else's room. It would be rude to intrude. It helped to put big signs on the main items in the room like "John's Bed", "John's Bathroom", "John's Closet", "John's Clothes".

The more that John's memory left him, the more that his essence remained and showed through. John was always a social person, so he was never in his room. He lived in a memory care unit where all of the patients had similar issues. John was mobile as he had been when he could still drive his car. He was all over the halls in his wheelchair, checking what was going on.

In a memory care unit, they often introduce themselves to each other a few times a day. They don't necessarily remember the other person, certainly not their name, but after a few months there is a familiarity that causes them to eat or to watch the lounge TV together. John enjoyed saying the rosary in a small group of 5-6 led by his favorite male caregiver, Dennis.

John recognized Jay's wife Annie Malone, but he often forgot connections that

people had to each other. He would ask Annie what relation she was, and she would reply "I am Jay's wife." And every time John would exclaim "I'm so happy for him!". John meant it as a huge compliment to Annie.

As John's memory worsened his coping mechanism was his sense of humor. He was so sharp and quick with his wit that he often caught people completely by surprise. They would see this 90+ year old guy repeating himself with obvious memory issues. They would make the mistake of underestimating him. He would suddenly crack a joke or make a witty comeback and their jaws would drop.

Rhyme was another coping mechanism that John used to avoid being frustrated by not being able to remember things. Rhyme came from his love of music. He would turn anything that he heard instantly into a made-up rhyme or even a nickname. His favorite female caregiver was named Ruvi. John immediately tagged her "Ruby Tuesday" and she would laugh.

John had a lifelong love of music and singing since his childhood days in the glee club. He had a wonderful deep singing voice with a lot of resonance. They say that when you get older, often very old memories become sharper. One day in 2022, John was sitting in his wheelchair out in a lounge with about 10 people in the area. Jay asked him a music question and John suddenly began singing a song very loudly. It must have been a song from his glee club days because Jay had never heard John sing it before. (John used to embarrass his kids a bit when they were younger by suddenly singing some old song in public so they heard him sing a lot while growing up.) After his full three-minute performance, John received a standing ovation from the nurses and patients.

Only about a month before his death, John was wheeled out into the large lobby area with other patients for some scheduled entertainment. By this

stage John wasn't very alert. Most often he was slumped to the side in his wheelchair with his eyes closed, appearing to be sleeping. John appeared to be sleeping through a pianist performing various tunes. As he began playing a Sinatra song, John opened his eyes and sang the entire song in a loud deep clear voice. The offices of the facility's executives and staff all have doors that open onto the lobby. They got up and came out to see who was singing so beautifully. Several said that they were amazed because they had just seen John appear to be sleeping. He was the last person who they expected to be the singer. They couldn't believe that he could sing like that at 95 years old.

Despite Alzheimer's robbing John of his memory and his physical health. John remained happy and positive. His warmth as a person showed through. Caregivers at the facilities where he lived in his last year on earth went out of their way to remark how special he was. Even those who met him near the end when outwardly he was a shell of his former self, said that John was their favorite patient. He would give them a kind look or mutter "thank you" to them.

In recalling all of these memories/stories of John, I suddenly realized that he had a simple mantra that he always said in conversation. "BE POSITIVE". John was a happy, positive person. That's how he lived every aspect of his life. That was what people could see and feel that drew them to him for 95 years.

On a Tuesday in January 2023, John couldn't finish his breakfast. That wouldn't have been a big deal for anyone else, but it was for John. It meant that something might be wrong.

About three years earlier, John began to completely clean his plate enthusiastically when he ate. His entire adult life prior to this he enjoyed a good conversation with meals. But suddenly when a plate of food was put in front of him, he focused on finishing it all. He couldn't even hear anyone

attempting to talk with him while he was eating. The only explanation that made sense was that maybe he was reverting to his childhood. When his mother Emily put food on that big round table for the family of nine, everyone probably focused on eating before all of the food was gone.

John stopped eating and drinking that Tuesday. He entered Hospice Care with new specialized nurses added to his care. John was mostly unconscious laying in bed for the next three days as family members came to visit him. The Hospice folks were shocked that John never was in pain, so he was never given morphine or any other painkiller. His wife Joan was the last person to be with him on Friday night. John died in his sleep several hours later on Saturday morning.

God granted John a peaceful, painless death as a reward for the caring life that he had led. As Alzheimer's stripped away his memory and his physical health, it could never touch the happy positive caring soul that was John.

Cemetery Details

Lakeview Memorial Park

1300 Route 130 North
Cinnaminson, NJ 08077

Previous Events

Eulogy

JAN 27. 10:15 AM (ET)

St Charles Borromeo Church
2500 Branch Pike
Cinnaminson, NJ 08077-3798
(856) 829-3322

Funeral Mass

JAN 27. 10:30 AM (ET)

St. Charles Borromeo Church
2500 Branch Pike & Pomona Road
Cinnaminson, NJ 08077

Tribute Wall



“ So sorry to hear. He was such a wonderful man. Karen huckel-iovine



karen iovine - January 27, 2023 at 03:19 PM



“ Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of John S. Ungvarsky Jr.



January 26, 2023 at 02:42 AM



“ A Full Life was purchased for the family of John S. Ungvarsky Jr.



January 23, 2023 at 05:20 PM



“ Kathleen And Kurt lit a candle in memory of John S. Ungvarsky Jr



Kathleen and Kurt - January 22, 2023 at 10:19 PM