



Eugene Klaaren

August 9, 1937 - October 17, 2015

EUGENE KLAAREN, 78 Eugene Marion Klaaren died Saturday October 17, 2015 at Holland Hospital in the presence of his family. Gene leaves his wife and partner of 54 years, Mary Decker Klaaren. He also leaves his children Jonathan Eugene, Kristen Jeanne, and Joshua Friend Klaaren as well as his sisters Mary Ann Andersen and Joy Ortiz and his brother Keith. Gene was grandfather to Joshua and Kelly's children Josie and Nadine of Asheville, North Carolina; Kristen and Scott's children Kai, Micah, and Hannah of Ashland, Virginia; and Jonathan and Pippa's children Jessica and Rebecca of Johannesburg, South Africa. He was a special uncle to Joy's children Fitemi, Bentasi, Rikki, and Martina Forgwe and also to twelve more nieces and nephews through his and Mary's sisters and their spouses

Gene was a graduate of Hope College, Emory University, Western Theological Seminary, and Harvard University. He served as professor of theology and religious studies at Wesleyan University from 1968 to 2006 and was a member of South Congregational Church in Middletown, Connecticut. A service will be held at 2 pm on Friday, October 23 at Third Reformed Church, 111 W. 13th St., Holland, where Gene's parents Marion and Cornelia Klaaren were members.

Tribute Wall



“ Eugene Klaaren

August 31, 2022 at 01:26 PM



“ *"Sad to learn this news, rather late in the game. Gene was a gracious and generous teacher and colleague. I have been grateful to have known him. I miss him, but will always recall him fondly. My condolences to his family."*

Christian Wedemeyer - July 01, 2019 at 12:00 AM



“ *"I just learned of Gene's death from the Wesleyan Alumni Magazine. I feel compelled to let the Klaaren family know how important Gene was to me during my time at Wesleyan 1971-1975. I was a Religion major, and took all of Gene's classes. He inspired me to think clearly, feel deeply, and live truthfully. I never took the time to go back to Wesleyan to thank him, so I am thanking him now. Gratefully, Nancy Luberoff"*

Nancy Luberoff - January 24, 2016 at 12:00 AM

GS

“I took several courses with Gene during my years at Wesleyan, as did my wife, Sarah. We had the pleasure of house sitting (and cat sitting for Rudman and Sasha) for Gene and Mary one semester. Gene was a terrific teacher and mentor, and it was largely due to his influence that I decided to continue my theological education after Wesleyan. His reading of the New Testament opened a whole new world of theological possibilities to me. The last time I saw Gene was at the American Academy of Religion meeting in Montreal several years ago. As ever, he conveyed that cheerful, kindly, and thoughtful demeanor that I appreciated so much as one of his students decades earlier. My heart goes out to Mary and the children.”

Gus Spohn - December 30, 2015 at 12:00 AM

DT

“Dear Mary and family, I was so saddened to learn of Gene's passing. I read the many notes of condolence on file here, and it was as if Gene came alive through them. I, too, remember his booming voice, his strong bass in the choir, his dry sense of humor, his strong body swimming in the cold Lake Michigan, the way he held my feet during the foot-washing drama on Maunday Thursday (he was a very good Jesus!), our conversations and his passion for Honda (and Acura) cars. Please know that, even now, we are sending up prayers for your comfort, peace, and grace, always grace. With much sympathy, Duncan Taylor (& Jeanne)”

Duncan Taylor - December 18, 2015 at 12:00 AM

CR

“I am so sad to hear the news. My thoughts and prayers are with you. Sending hugs.”

Claudia Ruf - November 19, 2015 at 12:00 AM

JU

“*Dear Professor Klaaren, This is Juliet, one of your favorite students (I think) who held you in high regard as her favorite professor. You helped rescue my faith after having a 'meltdown' my senior year of college and then redeeming the experience by writing my senior thesis with you. I recalled today smoking with you in your study and laughing about good and bad memories of growing up in very religious families. You became like a father to me during that time. I will always remember you with great affection. Best to you and yours. See you in the Great Beyond...I cannot wait to see you again.*

Yours, Juliet”

Juliet - November 12, 2015 at 12:00 AM

JC

“*A big smile, a wave from the deck, a great conversation, a swim in the lake, seeing Gene with his family. I will miss him and think of him often... Mary you and your family are in my thoughts.*”

jeff colvin - October 25, 2015 at 12:00 AM

FF

“Paris, 23 October 2015
Dear Uncle Gene,
After seeing you this July at our family reunion, I never thought I would be reading your Obituary in October. My last memory of you was of you playing with your grandkids (all 6 of them!) and most of your grandnieces and grandnephews at Kee West cottage. And here I am today, stuck on the other side of the Atlantic, writing out these few lines for your funeral that I'm unable to attend. I'm sorry that you had to go so soon. I'm sorry for not being at Third Reformed Church today with the rest of the family. I just wanted to let you know that I'm so grateful for all that you have done for our family. You have always been there for us. Like Grandma and Grandpa, you were a pillar for our mom in raising four kids on her own. Uncle Gene, I'm sure that many family members and friends will share their stories today. I can only speak of my own experience by saying that you brought so much sunlight into my life. Thanks to you, I was able to discover South Africa and attend Jon & Pippa's wedding. One of my fondest memories was of you singing (a capella I believe) at the wedding service. That reminded me so much of Grandpa singing in Third church (although you were more on key than grandpa). I also recall our ascent up Lion's Rump Mountain, just the two of us, followed by our walk on the beach near Cape Town. Closer to home, I also remember the summers when you would come to repaint 91 East 15th, always in Grandpa's favorite colour scheme: cream and burgundy. Or when you made it possible for Uncle Keith to visit us in Paris (or Place de Clichy as he would say) for the Retro-mobile show. So many priceless memories that you made possible. It brings me great comfort to know that your life - as a father, grandfather, husband, brother, uncle, friend and teacher - touched us all. It brings me even more comfort to know that you left this world having lived life to the fullest. And I truly hope that we - your friends and family - brought you as much joy as you brought to us. On this note, I would like to finish by quoting Rosa Parks who said: Memories of our lives, of our works and our deeds will continue in others. With love, Fitemi”

Fitemi Forgwe - October 25, 2015 at 12:00 AM

JE

“We feel so lucky to have known Gene as part of our Lake Michigan neighborhood. Talking with him never failed to brighten the day, his smile was a ray of sunshine. A genuinely nice, caring person with a great sense of humor. Rest in peace, Gene, we'll miss you. Our sympathy to Mary and family.”

Jane and Greg Earl - October 24, 2015 at 12:00 AM

KW

“Mary, Jonathan, Josh, Kristen - I'm so sorry for your loss. Although I didn't know Gene or your family very long, it was clear that he was a very special man and your family was filled with love. Even though he was in the hospital he still had a light and spirit that brightened my day. When I went into work the day after his passing there was a bright beam of sunshine coming in window from the room where I first met Gene & your family. I like to think he was turning the tables and saying "good morning sunshine" to me this time. There are people you meet in life, even for a brief moment, that you will always remember - Gene & his wonderful family are some of those people. My sincere condolences for your loss, your family is in my thoughts and prayers.”

Katie Wheeler - October 24, 2015 at 12:00 AM

LH

“Dear Mary, blessings to you and your family as you grieve the loss of Gene. Kathy, Michael and Dick join with me in sending you our prayers of comfort and peace. Lindsey Huddleston, Batavia, IL 10/23/2015”

Lindsey Huddleston - October 23, 2015 at 12:00 AM

RT

“*DEAR MARY,we just heard of Gene's passing our prayers go out to you and your family,GOD BLESS .ralph and Marge tacey.*”

Ralph tacey - October 23, 2015 at 12:00 AM