



EMANUEL "LEE" "MANNY" LEON

DECEMBER 2, 1929 ~ SEPTEMBER 24, 2024

Emanuel "Lee" "Manny" Leon, who was raised during the Great Depression and savored the American dream on his terms, died at age 94. Our father died in his beloved Sedona Arizona with family at his side on September 24, 2024 of natural causes.

Although saddened, we do not mourn our father's passing because he will live forever in our hearts as proof that living a thoroughly decent life is truly noble and blessed. He loved, and was loved by, his family. Through a deep-rooted dedication to his craft and a steadfast commitment to support his family, our Father was a master mechanic, a self-taught engineer, an entrepreneur (although he would call it running a business to put food on the table) and an educator. First and foremost, he was a dedicated husband, father, grandfather and great grandfather.

Lee was born on December 2, 1929 in Chicago, Illinois to Irving and Susan Leon. Irving was born in Russia. Susan was born in Brazil. As our father would tell it, Irving was not exactly handsome and had no money. Susan, on the other hand, was a beauty. Somehow, Irving convinced Susan to marry him. Irving had a talent for retail sales but his ethnic and religious background were impediments to securing a job. To overcome those impediments (and support his family) he started his own businesses — jewelry stores. Susan, dutifully assisted by young Lee (or as he was called during his youth, Manny), supplemented family finances by taking in wash and other odd jobs. The love and work ethic Irving and Susan shared were key parts of our father's foundational beliefs. Our father was educated at Todd Naval Academy (Woodstock IL), Von Steuben High School (Chicago) and Wilbur Wright College (Chicago).

Our father enjoyed most everything the 1950's offered to a 20-year-old in Chicago. He distinguished himself tuning and building hot rods, sports cars, motorcycles and boats. He won several motorsport competitions, including a boat race across Lake Michigan in 1952 which resulted in his picture being on the front page of the Chicago Daily News! Lee served in the Air Force where he learned to fly. He was also drawn to firearms (winning several shooting contests, including a city-wide championship), jazz and opera.

On February 9, 1957 our father married the love of his life, our mother Tennesa Jane Dean. They met through a blind date arranged by mutual friends in Monmouth Illinois, a small town 200+ miles from Chicago. Our mother had lived in Monmouth her entire life. Our father had lived in Monmouth just a couple of years as a youngster. In fact, our mother and father had lived just a few doors from each other in Monmouth but had never met until that fateful blind date, twenty plus years later. Our parents lived in Lake Zurich Illinois for over 40 years, raised four children and built a successful business selling go-karts, lawnmowers, outboard motors, chain saws and motorcycles. St. Francis de Sales Catholic Church was the focal point of their spiritual and social lives. Our father spent many Saturday afternoons working on a customer's engine listening to a radio broadcast of the Metropolitan Opera, hosted by Milton Cross. But he would not hesitate to take a break from the opera to engage in meaningful (and enjoyable) bench racing with a customer. Our mother encouraged our father to install a skeet shooting range in our backyard, overlooking the fields where (when no one was shooting!), we rode motorcycles, drove dune buggies and "boated" on a pond slightly larger than our boat.

In the mid-'70's our father decided to sell his business. Seeking to utilize his mechanical interests he taught auto repair at Harper Community College and then developed and conducted training courses for Robert Bosch Corporation, Borg Warner Corporation and Isuzu Motors.

As empty nesters, our parents travelled extensively throughout the United States and fell in love with Sedona Arizona. Sedona was a financial stretch for retirement but for several years our parents saved and planned to build their dream home. They found a special building lot and as our mother would recount, their real estate agent would not present their offer but our parents' offer was not intended to insult, only reflect what they could pay — so our parents made the offer. The seller replied, telling our parents it was their lucky day (the seller, recently divorced, was eager to start a new chapter in his life, so were our parents). Our parents enjoyed visiting their home in Sedona and truly enjoyed planning their retirement. Tragically our parents did not retire together. After selling their Illinois home and possessions they set off driving to Sedona. On the way they were in an automobile crash, in which our mother died and our father was seriously injured.

After over a year of surgeries and rehab our father arrived in Sedona. Although unable to share it with our mother, our father enjoyed living in the southwest. For more than 15 years he enjoyed the natural beauty, history and culture of the southwest and enthusiastically shared it with his children, grandchildren and great granddaughter.

Our father was preceded in death by our mother (Tennesa Jane), our sister (Tennesa Susan) and our grandparents (Irving and Susan). Our father is survived by three children, Christopher (Sandra) Leon, Michael (Nancy Remus) Leon and Catherine Cawthon; eight grandchildren, Bob (Ashley) Spircoff, Amanda (Ryan) Kim, Evan Leon, Brianna Leon, Daniel Leon, Jacob Cawthon, Tanner Cawthon and Gabrielle Cawthon; and great-granddaughter, Hazel Tinnie Kim. The family wishes to express their thanks to Lee's caregivers: Mary T, Monique, Pauline and Tracy. Special thanks are extended to Joanne Brosz and other members of St John Vianney Catholic Church of Sedona for the spiritual support and the comfort they provided to our father. A funeral mass will be held at St. John Vianney Catholic Church at 10:00 am on December 30, 2024. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to St. John Vianney Catholic Church of Sedona Arizona.