

Ralph Stark

1925—2014

In my dream I saw an Angel
In my heart I know it's true
Something else about that Angel
That Angel saw me too.

Yes, in my dream I saw that Angel
And in my heart I know it's true
And something else about that Angel
That Angel was you.

Ralph Stark

May 14, 2025 - January 24, 2014



The Stark Family Band, sans Mom (Eva). Seated (l-r), Ralph and Neil. Standing (l-r), brothers Gene and Ed.

Any discussion of Ralph Stark's life must begin with family—the Stark Family Band. In the days when the Salton Sea still had enough water and vitality to attract visitors, Ralph and his two brothers and parents played old hillbilly folk tunes brought from Arkansas. They never made it to the Grand Ole Opry, but Ralph came away with a lifelong love of music and family.

Born Harold Ralph Stark



in Imperial, California, Ralph adopted his middle name early on. His father had done the same thing, choosing Neil over Albert. Ralph graduated from high school in 1943. Like many of the Greatest Generation, he felt a duty to serve in the military. He joined the Army Air Forces (also known as the Army Air Corps) that year and trained as a bombardier.



Fortunately for many of those reading this, the war ended just before Ralph was to be assigned to combat duty. He left the service in 1945 as a 2nd Lieutenant.

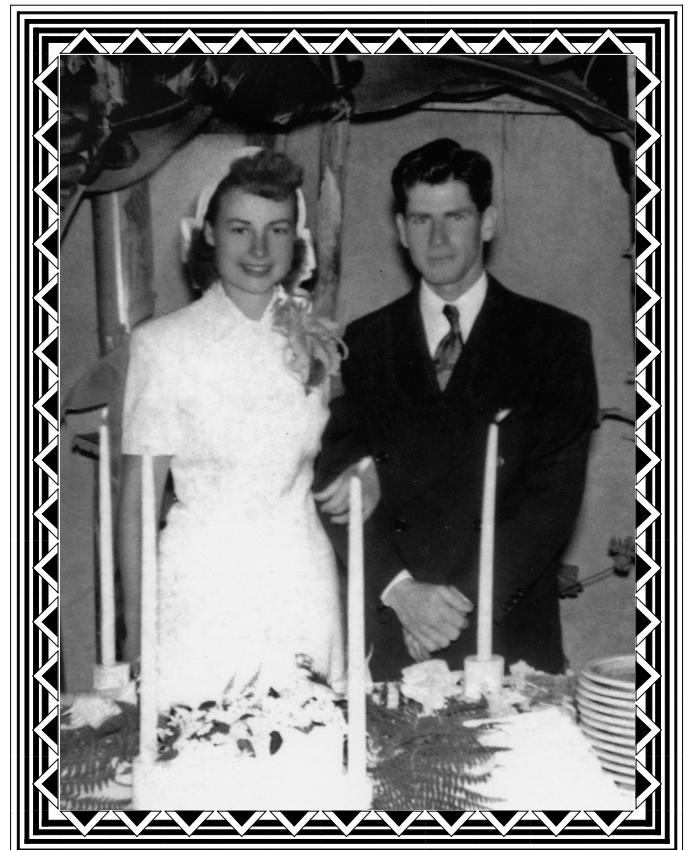
Ralph returned to the Imperial Valley and his high-school sweetheart, Loretta Underwood of Calipatria. They married in 1948.

Ralph's parents had not attended college. A high-school education was the norm then. Ralph's father worked at an ice company, which probably explained why Ralph never used the word

“refrigerator.” Had the young couple stayed in the Imperial Valley, their lives would have been quite different.

However, the newlyweds moved to Pacific Beach in San Diego in 1948. Taking advantage of the GI Bill and his young bride's willingness to work outside the home, Ralph attended San Diego State College. He graduated with a B.A. in psychology, a minor in philosophy, and the tools to use both on his future children.

So how did that turn out? Read on.



Ralph Stark

A Purposeful Life

Loretta and Ralph moved to Lemon Grove in 1950, and then to Lakeside in 1960. Ralph started his career as a social worker for San Diego County. He then worked as a counselor in mental health for San Diego Superior Court where he evaluated defendants.

Ralph Stark was a man of commitments. When he exchanged vows with Loretta, he knew it would stick. Together, they decided to have a big fami-

ly. And he made it a priority to send all six children to college. Those commitments kept him in a job that he had stopped liking long before he was able to retire.

None of us are what we seem at first glance. We all contain surprises and contradictions. Thus we can accept that Ralph was both rigid and tolerant, serious and amused, protective and trusting, thrifty and giving, loving and tough-loving.

Ralph is survived by his wife Loretta Stark, daughters Susan Hughes (Tujunga, CA), Janet Stark (Reseda, CA), Antera (Mt. Shasta, CA), and Linda Stark (Los Angeles, CA); sons Lloyd Stark (Henderson, NV) and Bruce Stark (Redmond, WA); brother Eugene Stark (Port Angeles, WA); seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

"Do something of service to society."

—Ralph Stark



Love for Loretta

I remember the afternoon naps on the living room floor that Ralph and Loretta would take together on weekends, curled up in "spooning" fashion near the fireplace. It spoke volumes about their enduring love. (Bruce)

Sweet dancing in the kitchen. The AM/FM played and Mom & Dad spontaneously launched into the fox trot. It was clear they had done some serious dancing before we came along. (Janet)

Fond Memories

I will remember him most for taking Bruce and me on a variety of summer vacation road trips. These included camping, and helped stoke the fires within me for the attraction toward nature. (Llo)

When we were very young, he would come to our bunk-bed room with a story he made up on the spot. They always began with, "Once upon a time, in the Black Forest of Germany..." Dad was a natural storyteller and often included dark characters such as black witches and warlocks. (Janet)

Music

Fireside acoustic guitar and family singing will remain as my most cherished memories, and something I've realized over time as quite rare. We learned to harmonize and some of those old songs will stay with me always, especially the tear-jerkers. "Cabin in the Glen" was a favorite. (Janet)

A highlight from childhood is the nightly guitar playing

and music that we shared as a family. He would play guitar and sing old songs and we would dance sometimes. (Susan)

I remember young family gatherings in the living room, while Dad played his guitar and sang songs for us. We would beg him to sing the tragic songs like "Cold Winter Night" and "Put Me in Your Pocket," and he would

shed tears with us. It was a special gift that he could cry. (Linda)

Even in his last days, when I pushed him about in his wheelchair while singing some of his favorite songs, he perked up and said, "Don't stop. Please." Music brightened his spirit and there seemed to be something magical about music that he cherished. (Bruce)

Love and Discipline

Managing us as teens can't have been an easy job. We signed-in and -out on a pad near the front door so they could keep track of us. (Janet)

He held strong principles regarding his role as father and husband, and he lived by them. Punishment for the

kids was never administered emotionally but with a specific, stated, even perfunctory atmosphere. He would never use violence against us. Through his non-violent behavior, I could learn firsthand how to treat my own wife and children. He did, however, threaten innumera-

ble times to go out and pick a "switch" from the olive tree and whip us if we did not behave. We all knew this would never happen, and it never did. That we knew he would never follow through reveals how much we felt his convictions regarding child-raising. (Bruce)

Protecting the Family

After one family road trip, we went to the horse boarders to pick up our horse, Jerome. I rode him home over rough terrain and he broke into an unstoppable gallop. I ended up flat on my back in the brush. Dad appeared and gently lifted and carried me to the car. He and Mom had been shadowing me on the road nearby. Our protector rescued me. (Janet)

Dad taught me to drive a stick shift in the old pick up truck and was very patient and understanding when I banged the fender up in the garage and another time when a lady hit my car as I pulled out of a parking space. I felt he was always on my side. (Susan)

Once on a family vacation a group of bikers--and I mean threatening bikers--surrounded our car, at which time Ralph calmly got out of the car, walked back and opened the trunk and pulled out his pistol, loaded it so that everyone could see him doing so, closed the trunk and firmly placed his elbow on the car with the gun pointing upwards, as if to say "you do not want to mess with me." The bikers dispersed immediately. (Bruce)

Ralphisms

Cut the mustard!

Hightail it!

OUT! (when he was mad and wanted the kids out of the living room and into bed)

He didn't pay me A RED CENT!

Don't let any grass grow under your feet.

He's a good person -- for a Republican

Don't take any wooden nickels.

A Close Encounter: Ross Rudel

I first met Ralph on a visit to Lakeside as Linda's college boyfriend. Having been fully apprised of Ralph's legendary woodshed discussions with prospective suitors (I have a vague memory of a gun in one story), I arrived with a great sense of trepidation. Also, knowing Ralph's history as a court psychologist, I understood the gravity of the situation when he asked me how my childhood had gone.

Seeking to avoid a day of layers peeled from what was arguably an excessively difficult adolescence, I announced that my childhood had been 'perfect.'

This answer seemed to create a small knot somewhere deep in Ralph's psyche that he just couldn't shake. I found myself having to search hard for recollections of sunlight from my dark past to defend my proclamation as I encountered Ralph pressing the issue around every corner.

The spell was finally broken when Ralph inadvertently, I suppose, spilled a full glass of wine on my lap at the dinner table. I responded graciously, which served to turn the tables. From that point on we proceeded with a mutual understanding and admiration for having survived the day.

Intellectual Pursuits

Sometimes we kids became test subjects in psychology experiments, plus IQ and Rorschach tests. (Janet)

I greatly value him for allowing me to go to college and study subjects of my choice, and to gravitate toward any career that fueled my passions. He also did not push religion upon his kids, allowing them to make up their minds and having the tolerance of different views. He was a devout agnostic, and we had many an interesting conversation about atheism, agnosticism, and religion. (Llo)

Evening meals were times to discuss controversial subjects, and Dad played devil's advocate. We were challenged to defend our point of view, teaching me to be a critical, independent thinker. He said more than once I'd make a good lawyer. (Janet)

Dad encouraged free thinking and discussion of all points of view and did not try to mold us into any belief system. He always told us we were very smart. (Susan)

Cars

He named his cars. After he sold the "Loose Goose" to a stranger, he had tears in his eyes. (Linda)

Dad was meticulous about regular maintenance of the family cars, including my cars after I'd moved out, and always offered to buy them back when I was done with them. (Janet)

He only bought Fords. He hated General Motors. (Llo)

Likes (from Llo)

- ◇ Road trips; Ralph and Loretta traveled to all 48 contiguous states by car.
- ◇ Ralph loved his vodka and Steel Reserve beer.
- ◇ Ralph and Loretta played dominoes nearly every night for the last 20 years.
- ◇ *The Jackie Gleason Show* ("and away we go!") and *Hee-Haw*. He loved the Okie/Arkie characters, and the music, and he especially liked the country-western guitar picking and singing.

Loretta's View:

Ralph met me in front of my parent's house in Calipat. We walked out, across the street, to a fence with a pasture beyond. He asked me to marry him, and I put my arms around him and said yes. We sealed it with a kiss and lived happily ever after.

Goodnight, Mrs. Calabash, wherever you may be.