



## Dan J. Mahalek

September 22, 1942 - January 9, 2024

Dan Mahalek came into this world as an orphan and departed as a much-loved, respected patriarch of a large, loving, extraordinary family. He will be deeply missed. Dan Mahalek's Celebration of Life will be held Saturday, March 23rd, 10:30, in the Ponderosa Room at UNK's Nebraskan Student Union. The lot next to the Student Union will be designated for parking. Financial memorial gifts will be given to Habitat for Humanity.

Dan was born on September 22, 1942 in a Denver maternity home, placed in an orphanage, and adopted at eleven months of age by Joe and Mary Mahalek of Julesburg, Colorado who gave him a loving home. Finances were difficult during his boyhood, yet Dan said he never felt poor because everyone else was in the same situation.

Growing up on a farm near the South Platte River provided Dan with many opportunities to explore nature and work alongside his father. They both enjoyed cars. Mary and Joe encouraged Dan's passion for learning; providing him with chemistry and erector sets and supporting his love of reading. Dan had fond memories of his childhood and participated in many school activities and sports, attending sock hops and the movies of the day at the Hippodrome Theater. He enjoyed attending Julesburg Class of 1960 reunions; staying in contact with his classmates year-round.

A full scholarship gave Dan the opportunity to attend the University of Northern Colorado where he earned both Bachelors and Masters of Arts degrees in Science and Physical Geography, graduating Phi Theta Kappa.

Dan's first teaching position was as a science teacher and wrestling coach in Valentine. He then taught and coached in Bertrand before taking a position as Geography teacher and coach at Kearney Junior High School. Over three decades plus Dan taught a number of different subjects and coached various sports. Along with his eighth-grade teammates, he won a Kiewit Teaching Award for a unit on sandhill cranes. In retirement, it brought him great joy to encounter former students who called him "Coach," reliving past wrestling matches, or told him how much they now loved history.

In 1967 Dan married Virgene Myers with whom he had two sons, David Joseph and James Michael. In 1978 he married Sandy Mahalek and they had Christopher Daniel. Dan and Sandy had their 45th anniversary last December. Family was a high priority with Dan. He worked hard, taking on extra jobs, to provide them with a good home, a college education, and extras such as travel opportunities.

In later years, Dan located his birth mother and siblings in the Denver area. Sadly, his mother Lucille Aparicio Petricich had already passed but he had the unexpected pleasure of meeting his half siblings Dennis, Marlene, Mark, Luanne, and George and learning everything there was to know about his family of origin.

The above information conveys facts, dates, and places, yet doesn't capture the essence of the man. Dan was an extremely curious individual, interested in a variety of subject areas, who would intensely study his new pursuit until he mastered it. Coupled with a great memory and a cell phone with an unlimited data plan, Dan was a formidable opponent in everything from Trivial

Pursuit to spirited arguments. Interest areas over the years included a wide variety of topics ranging from science to history to reading. The Civil War was a special interest area.

Dan's interest in his newest topic was typically so intense that he would drive family and friends to distraction with his pursuit of learning. Many of these interests resulted in collections with his office becoming a "mini Smithsonian." Dan loved sharing his knowledge with others, and his passion for teaching came shining through when he had a chance to share his collections with his grandchildren and tell stories of the history behind the artifacts.

Dan's curiosity and love of learning also led to wonderful trips in the United States, Europe, and Russia. Their favorite trips were the ones Dan and Sandy shared with their sons, Dan regaling them with information as they traveled along. Dan was also proud to be from Kearney. He loved taking family and out-of-town friends on local tours to show off the city's latest developments.

It would be impossible to tell Dan's story without mentioning his medical challenges, which were many. So it seemed particularly cruel for him to have non-Hodgkin's lymphoma late in life, having already endured so much. Each time Dan squarely faced the problem, using his intellectual skills to learn everything there was to know about the medical condition, and how to survive it. Then he set forth to do the things needed to regain his health. Dan had a tremendous will to live which persisted right up until his last breath.

However, the true essence of Dan Mahalek was his love of family. He was so proud of his sons David, Jim, and Chris, men who shared many of his qualities. He reveled in their successes and felt down about their setbacks. He followed their careers closely and was knowledgeable about their jobs. Much of their father/son time together when they were young centered on

sports.....and as much as Dan liked seeing his sons play in big game situations; he took as much joy in watching them play stick ball in the back yard. Dan also supported his wife Sandy in all her interests and endeavors, learning and growing with her. They made a good team.

This love of family extended to Dan's three daughters-in-law and then to eleven grandchildren. Dan's interests widened from sports to art, music, dance, and gymnastics.....getting a kick out of each individual grandchild and their special qualities. Dan's love of family was returned eighteen times over as each and every family member did their utmost to make Dan's last days the best they could be, honoring his wishes to stay at home.

One night, after a two sons helped him navigate into the bedroom and into bed and other family members were helping in a variety of ways, Dan and Sandy were left alone to talk. "Those kids are really something aren't they?" Dan observed. "Yes they are." "Pretty good for an orphan."

Preceding Dan in death were his parents Joe and Mary Mahalek, his birth mother Lucille Petricich, infant brothers James and Robert Mahalek, and brother Dennis Agnew.

Left to mourn his passing and honor his memory are his cousin Yvonne Anderson and husband Glen; sisters Luanne Petricich and Marlene Sotak; brothers Mark Agnew and George Petricich and his wife Tracy; sisters-in-law Kathy Viterise and husband Mike; Joan and Gary Pursley and their sons Erik and Alex.

Also, David and Andrea plus their family of Joshua, Katelyn, Abigail, and Jackson. James and Kati Mahalek and their family of Blake, Macy, Ryan, Lauren, Alexa, and Drew. Christopher and Sara Mahalek and their family of Mark and Avery.



# Previous Events

## Celebration of Life

MAR **23**. 10:30 AM (CT)

Ponderosa Room at U.N.K. Nebraskan Student Union  
1013 W. 27th Street  
Kearney, NE 68845

# Tribute Wall



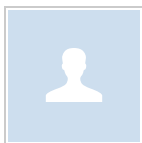
“ 🙏❤️🙏 *A Loving, Well-Written Memory* 😊😭

Goldie - March 18, 2024 at 06:09 AM



“ *I did not have Mr. Mahalek as a teacher, but I was able to work with him through my job. He was such a determined and hard working person. Thank you for letting me come into your home. Dan, truly loved his family. He talked of them often and fondly.*  
*Lisa Bennett*

Lisa Bennett - January 19, 2024 at 07:00 PM



“ *Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Dan J. Mahalek.*



January 15, 2024 at 11:41 PM



“ *Mr. Mahalek was such an amazing teacher that made you want to learn. He was so passionate about the things he loved and enjoyed. I got my first detention in his class but he couldn't convince himself to make me stay after school, he had such a big heart.*

Michelle Wonder - January 15, 2024 at 02:33 PM

RS

“ Dan was truly a gift from God to all of those who knew him. I believe he moved to Kearney in 1967 and helped coach our KHS wrestling team along with Coach John Perry. I learned so many life lessons from them both. He will be missed. Thanks Coach.

*Ron Smith*

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**Ron Smith** - January 15, 2024 at 02:02 PM

LR

“ Oh how the Julesburg Class of 1960 will miss you Dan. We lived a great life growing up in the 1940's and 50's. Your keen memory of those years will be missed. Thank you for taking me to prom. You were one of the good guys. Well done. Love and Sympathy to Sandy and the rest of your fine family. Lora Rae (Repp) Reuter

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**Lora Reuter** - January 15, 2024 at 12:23 AM

MC

“ Mary C. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Dan J. Mahalek.

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**Mary C.** - January 11, 2024 at 10:09 PM

JP

“ So sorry to learn of Dan's passing. In all my years of coaching wrestling, Dan was the best partner I ever had. He was a true friend and very much missed when thinking about Kearney. The best years. Sincere sympathy, John Perry and Bobbi

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**John and Bobbi Perry** - January 11, 2024 at 01:00 PM



“ *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum* was purchased for the family of Dan J. Mahalek.



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January 11, 2024 at 12:56 PM



“ Kyle and Dena Harshbarger planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Dan J. Mahalek.

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**Kyle and Dena Harshbarger** - January 11, 2024 at 12:56 PM