



## Dr. Steven J. Rothenberger

September 14, 1947 - July 4, 2025

Steven Rothenberger, 77, of Kearney, Nebraska, passed away on July 4, 2025, at Bethany Home in Minden. A memorial service will be held at 11:00 a.m. on July 25, 2025, at First Presbyterian Church in Kearney, with Pastor Sharon Rees officiating. A private family interment will take place at the Kearney Cemetery. In lieu of flowers, memorials are suggested to Prairie Plains Resource Institute or First Presbyterian Church of Kearney, where he was a long-time member.

Steven was born on September 14, 1947, in Kansas City, Kansas, to Milton E. and Kathryn W. Rothenberger. He grew up in Gering, Nebraska, and graduated from Gering High School in 1965. He earned a B.S. in Biology Education and an M.S. in Biology from Kearney State College and a Ph.D. in Botany from North Dakota State University. On March 27, 1970, he married Judy Runge in Kearney. To that union, a daughter, Jennifer, was born.

A dedicated educator for more than 40 years, Steven proudly taught and mentored numerous students who went on to become educators, scientists, ecologists, and healthcare professionals. His career began as a science teacher and coach in Marquette, Nebraska, followed by a faculty position at Midland Lutheran College. Steven spent the last 23 years of his career teaching at the University of Nebraska at Kearney (UNK), where he served as a professor of biology until his retirement in 2014. Following retirement, he was named professor emeritus. He also served as curator of the UNK herbarium. Steven was deeply involved in numerous professional and

conservation organizations, including Prairie Plains Resource Institute, Willa Cather Memorial Foundation, Nebraska Wildlife Federation, Great Plains Natural Science Society, the Nebraska Academy of Sciences, the National Wildlife Federation, and United Campus Ministries. An accomplished writer, Steven published numerous scholarly articles in scientific journals and contributed popular essays to Nebraskaland, The Midland, and The Platte Valley Review.

Steven fondly remembered his formative years in western Nebraska; most notably the joy of playing rock music in several bands in the Gering area. In 2000, Steven was inducted into the Nebraska Rock 'n' Roll Hall of Fame. After retiring, Steven wrote and published Scottsbluff in '62: A Rock 'n' Roll Retrospective of Small Town Nebraska, which details his love of music, his hometown, and current events of the 60's. He often described himself as a student of the prairie and the popular culture of the Great Plains. Steven was an avid runner. As a battle with Parkinson's eventually left him with limited mobility, Steven enjoyed watching the birds and squirrels that visited the plants, trees, and native grasses in his backyard. He instilled his curiosity and love of lifelong learning to his daughter.

Steven is survived by his wife, Judy Rothenberger of Kearney; daughter Jennifer (Benjamin) Dennis of Aurora; granddaughters Catherine and Claire; sister Jana (Jim) Kehn of Gering; brother Doug Rothenberger of Melbeta; two nieces and one nephew; and numerous cousins. He was preceded in death by his parents.

# Cemetery Details

## **Kearney Cemetery**

4400 Avenue I  
Kearney, NE 68847

# Previous Events

## **Memorial Service**

JUL **25**. 11:00 AM (CT)

First Presbyterian Church  
4511 6th Ave.  
Kearney, NE 68845

# Tribute Wall

UP

“ *UNK Biology and Health Sciences Program purchased the Country Basket Blooms for the family of Dr. Steven J. Rothenberger.*



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**UNK Biology and Health Sciences Program** - July 23, 2025 at 05:12 PM

MN

“ *Dear Judy and your family,  
My deepest sympathies to you on the loss of Steve--a remarkable human being. My memories of Steve are from our college days at then KSC, as ATO brothers. He was always bright, pleasant, kind, and funny among so many other great attributes. He's now gone, but will remain in your hearts forever. God bless him and you--RIP, Steve.*



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**Monty E Nielsen** - July 21, 2025 at 10:23 AM



“ *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Dr. Steven J. Rothenberger.*



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July 18, 2025 at 04:48 PM

BI

“ *Barb Icenogle planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Dr. Steven J. Rothenberger.*

Barb Icenogle - July 18, 2025 at 02:00 PM

BI

“ *Barb Icenogle purchased the Simply Elegant Spathephyllum for the family of Dr. Steven J. Rothenberger.*



Barb Icenogle - July 18, 2025 at 02:00 PM

  
Elizabeth  
Wethington

“ *I loved my time working with Steve at UNK towards the end of his career. I loved our conversations about music and wished I could go back in time to see his band play in the 1960s.*

Elizabeth Wethington - July 16, 2025 at 01:40 PM

LD

“ *So sorry to hear of his passing. He was such a nice man.  
Lucinda*

Lucinda Dennis - July 14, 2025 at 03:07 PM

KD

“ I was a friend of Steve's. Though he went to Gering High School and I to Scottsbluff High School, we very readily became friends in the community. I don't have to tell anyone that Steve was a gentleman, kind, out-going and very personable - this in addition to his many other attributes. I was fortunate to hear his sister, Jana, speak about Steve last night at the GHS Class of '65 60th Reunion dinner and what a tribute it was. She hit on every point that made this man one that made the world better for each of us; a person who was kind, caring, and a friend to us all. He afforded everyone he interacted with, with the same honesty, good manners, and unfailing fairness. That decency was precious and rare and something that we as family, friends, classmates, indeed, as a society, need to remember to value. Steve was extraordinary and we need more people like him. Farewell my friend. I look forward to connecting with you on the other side. - Kathy Dickson

Kathy Dickson - July 13, 2025 at 08:46 PM

MP

“ Our deepest sympathy to your family. My mom (Angela Kassmeier) always enjoyed her conversations with him. She often would quote something Steve would say.

Mary Ellen P. - July 13, 2025 at 08:29 PM

RM

“ I am deeply saddened by the passing of Dr. Rothenberger. He was my professor at Midland Lutheran College. His enthusiasm in the classroom, approachable demeanor, and teaching style has left an imprint on me to this day. He played a large part in my decision to become a college instructor. Your family has my deepest thoughts and prayers.



Ron D. Maly - July 13, 2025 at 01:42 PM



“ *I cherish the time that I got to be a partner of Steve's while he was at Midland University. I will always remember him fondly. Ron Johnson*

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**J. Ronald Johnson** - July 12, 2025 at 10:11 AM

TP

“ *My heartfelt condolences to the family. Dr. Rothenberger was my favorite teacher at Marquette Nebraska. Rest in Peace! Sincerely, Terri Pierson*

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**Terri Pierson** - July 11, 2025 at 01:01 PM

KS

“ *Steve was a great teacher and a great person, i remember him from my days at Marquette High School. He was one of my favorite teachers in high school. He made science interesting and fun. Sorry for your loss!*

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**Karl Sherman** - July 11, 2025 at 09:32 AM

MK

“ *Judy, I am sorry for your loss. Please know that you and your family are in my thoughts and prayers. I trust his spirit will always be near you. We now live in the KC area where I see he was born.---Mary Kommers*

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**Mary Kommers** - July 09, 2025 at 08:45 AM

KA

“ Steve was an interesting guy. I got a kick out of him sharing experiences from his younger days. He gave me one of his books that outlined info on the band he was part of — never would have guessed it!! Steve shared a table with my Jim Shiers when he was at Mount Carmel. My sympathy for your family's loss.

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**Kathy** - July 09, 2025 at 01:54 AM

DF

“ *"The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt within the heart."* Our sincere sympathy to you and your family. It has been a tough year for all of you. Hold on tight to your special memories and the joy you shared. Lifting you up in prayer.

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**Dennis and LaVonne Fries** - July 07, 2025 at 11:06 AM

MB

“ Steve was such a kind hearted man. Sorry for your loss.

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**Maureen Bird** - July 06, 2025 at 12:05 PM