



## Joe Kopka

September 4, 1931 - February 11, 2021

Joe Kopka was the third of four children born to parents who emigrated from a small village in the Carpathian Mountains in the former Austria-Hungary part of the Hapsburg Empire (now eastern Slovakia) and settled in Pittsburgh, PA where Joe's father worked in the steel mill. Joe was born in Pittsburgh, and was the first in his family to attend college. After graduating from Duquesne University, Joe served in the U.S. Air Force. In 1957, Joe married A. Jean Yourick one year after meeting her and telling her on their first date at Pittsburgh's Kennywood Amusement Park that he was going to marry her. The couple shared a 63 year marriage of devotion to each other. Jean died on August 22, 2020.

Joe's career in federal law enforcement began in 1960 as a Special Investigator for ATF in Elizabeth City, NC. As a Special Investigator, Joe spent many days at a time living under a tarp in a sleeping bag, eating canned hot dogs, in the dismal swamp area of eastern North Carolina waiting for moonshiners to return to their illicit, hidden whiskey stills so that he could arrest them and dynamite their stills. While stalking moonshiners near Rocky Mount, NC Joe attempted to arrest a moonshiner who took off running. Joe ran in pursuit; the moonshiner blasted Joe's legs with shotgun pellets. Joe continued running until he tackled the moonshiner. Joe was awarded a special award from ATF for his efforts. The judge in the case gave Joe the moonshiner's shotgun. Joe's family made it their practice to visit the families of

imprisoned moonshiners during the holidays to bring food and clothing to the families.

ATF transferred Joe several times: from Elizabeth City, NC to Rocky Mount, NC to Savannah, GA to Cary, NC and finally to Washington, DC in 1973 where he would finish his career with ATF. Joe was an inveterate collector; he kept copies of all his reports, photos of moonshine still raids and Revenue Agents, ATF advertisements, memos, and other memorabilia. Joe's massive collection now forms the "Joseph Kopka, ATF Revenue Agent Collection" in the Joyner Library at East Carolina University where North Carolina historian Frank Stephenson uses Joe's collection as an invaluable resource for his books on the history of moonshine in North Carolina. Joe is also mentioned in Alec Wilkinson's book on Garland Bunting, *Moonshine: A Life in Pursuit of White Liquor*.

When Joe retired from ATF after 26 years of service, ATF presented Joe its highest honor: The Gallatin Award. Shortly after retirement, Joe joined the staff of Senator Strom Thurmond (R, SC) as the Special Investigator for the US Senate Judiciary Committee (Chaired by Senator Joe Biden). There, Joe investigated high profile nominees for federal office, such as Ed Meese.

Joe and Jean loved to travel with the Carpatho-Rusyn Society to Eastern Europe to connect with their cultural heritage. Joe loved to retell the story of one of their trips to Prague. Joe, in his native language, asked a gentlemen in the Prague subway, "Znam pa chechski?" The gentleman responded, "Yes, I'm from San Francisco." Whether it was a trip to Eastern Europe or Germany (where Joe ate bratwurst at every gas station), Spain (mobbed by crowds during Semana Santa), Joe wanted to absorb everything there was to know about local culture and food.

Joe's other love was the Outer Banks of North Carolina. For many years, the

family vacationed in the same cottage in Kitty Hawk, and during Thanksgiving and Christmas returned to the OBX to stay at the Sea Ranch motel. Whether it was breakfast at the Jolly Roger, lunch at Sam and Omie's, dinner at Basnight's, or a trip to the Coastland Times bookstore, Joe loved interacting with those he encountered. He was an information sponge and a voracious reader and maintained his subscriptions to The Coastland Times newspaper and Our State magazine almost until his end. Joe loved sharing the OBX experience with his grandsons and their dads during their annual fall trips to the OBX. Joe got a kick out of wearing his baseball cap from Bob's Grill stating, "Eat and Get the Hell Out."

Before the ink dries on his obituary, Joe has reunited with Jean. She was, and is now, his rock for all eternity. The family requests that any remembrance of Joe or Jean be made as a donation to either:

The Lost Colony online at: [thelostcolony.org](http://thelostcolony.org) Or by mail: The Lost Colony, 1409 National Park Drive, Manteo, NC 27954

or

The Elizabethan Gardens online at: [elizabethangardens.org](http://elizabethangardens.org) Or by mail: Elizabethan Gardens, 1411 National Park Drive, Manteo, NC 27954

Joe is survived by his daughter Sherrie (Lionel) and grandchildren Lucy Boyce, Amelia (Burt), and Garland; son Kenneth(Barbara), and grandchildren Kameron, Ryan, and Macallister; brother Richard (Carol).

A family memorial service will be held at Quantico on February 23, 2021.

# Cemetery Details

## **Quantico National Cemetery**

18424 Joplin Rd  
Triangle, VA 22172

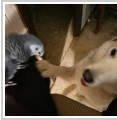
# Tribute Wall

SK

“ 5 years has flown by, but time stands still when you walk the beach, pier to pier..



SKK - February 11 at 10:29 AM



*I miss them both frequently and wish I could just walk across the street to see them. Neighbor Wendy*

Wendy E Maris - May 01 at 09:16 PM

SK

“ You should've been there!



SKK - February 01 at 07:02 PM



“ Still going strong!  
<https://www.bobsgrillobx.com/menus>  
Eat and Get the Hell out!

Sherrie Kopka-Kennedy - September 12, 2025 at 06:26 PM



“ For your 94th birthday, your favorite poet, Robert Frost:

*Nothing Gold Can Stay*

*Nature's first green is gold,  
Her hardest hue to hold.  
Her early leaf's a flower;  
But only so an hour.  
Then leaf subsides to leaf.  
So Eden sank to grief,  
So dawn goes down to day.  
Nothing gold can stay.*

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**Sherrie Kopka-Kennedy** - September 04, 2025 at 07:43 AM



“ Carol Ann is still managing the Jolly Roger!  
<https://jollyrogerobx.com>

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**Sherrie Kopka-Kennedy** - February 23, 2025 at 06:50 PM



“ <https://www.blakelyfuneralhome.com/obituary/r-j-duke-short>

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**Sherrie Kopka-Kennedy** - January 18, 2025 at 01:45 PM



“ OBX for eternity!!



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**Sherrie Kopka-Kennedy** - September 04, 2024 at 08:48 AM



“ *Loss teaches us about the worth of things. SK-K*

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**Sherrie Kopka-Kennedy** - February 11, 2024 at 09:21 AM



“ *Got a chill yesterday when Macallister stepped in my office door and pointed up to the sky and said "Yep, I'm doin good at school".... I said "what are you doing".....Mac said Papa always asked him first thing when he saw him : "You're doing well in school". Its just one of those laser burned in memories he/we have and fun to remember the times. Miss ya still Dad, Kenneth*

*(and yeah Dad, I can vouch for Mr. Mac, He's enjoying UT and getting good grades.)*



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**kenneth kopka** - December 19, 2023 at 11:55 PM



“ *<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5cdhUQHnhi4>*

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**Sherrie Kopka-Kennedy** - September 04, 2023 at 11:06 AM



“ *<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7hx4gdlfamo>*

*SK-K*

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**SK-K** - February 12, 2023 at 02:30 PM

KK

“ DAD, you know i was never good with dates. My beautiful better have IS! Yes she reminded me you have been gone for 2 years now. It seems like 2 months. TIME DOES FLY. I still think of you and Mom every day of my life. A memory, thought, feeling, or something during my everyday life activity i relate back. Funny on our picture viewers yesterday, randomly a picture i took of you during one of our many Baskin-Robins visit popped up! It was you staring at delicious cup of Pistachio ice cream (always in a cup with the sugar cone on top!yep!) Today Barbara went to Publix and picked up a pint of PISTACHIO FOR ME AND HER TO SHARE! I cried. Remembering a sad day in my life today 2 years ago. LOVE YOU DAD! Kenneth

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**ken kopka** - February 12, 2023 at 12:14 AM



“ Joe Kopka

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January 12, 2023 at 12:00 PM

DS

“ Joe was a very nice man. Met him at opm.

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**Don Settie** - September 02, 2022 at 10:37 PM

KK

“ Dad,

*What can I say? You embodied discipline. A product of a different era and time. Almost every time my generation and my sons' generation are talking about how tough things are now....the conversation always ends in "you wouldn't have lasted a day with my Dad/PapPap!" You were a man of little word, but big meaning, and a big generous heart. Dad was a simple man, gaining pleasure from simple things. I know I was tough on you (and Mom) in my youth. I am sure in 2021, (Kenneth as a child) would have been treated differently. You guys "just dealt with it." The stories I tell my sons about my childhood they find amazing..... and again, the conversation always ends with "I don't know how my parents put up with me?" I honestly still don't. I NEVER got a chance to say "thanks for puttin' up with all my crap and hey look, it paid off, I turned out pretty good." THANKS DAD Your support for me was different: less emotional, but more discipline and financial. And, oddly in life, that combined with Mom's more emotional support, was a great mix. I see some of your traits in me and ones from Mom. YOU ALWAYS KEPT THINGS EVEN KEEL, discipline, following rules and laws, proper behavior, responsibility, do the Right thing all the time. Thanks for all those trips to Nags Head, and the hockey games. I really looked forward to those trips/events. Yeah, they were simple. A simple guy having simple fun. We all know you wanted to go back to North Carolina. Times change and you adapted to doing what made the most sense. Staying in Virginia made the most sense to be near your children and their children. Thanks. Mom, really helped out as you got older. It seems like all the wives have to help out with the husbands..... I know you would have never said it, so THERE I SAID IT FOR YOU! You got your wish for the most part: to live the rest of your life in your home. We all tried to make it as comfortable for you as we could and I think we did a heck of a job.*

*I always wondered what it would be like not having parents around to take care of me or for me to take care of them. It feels a bit lonely. It was a chore for the last couple years and you would think I would*

*be happy that things are easier now, but I am not happier and I feel like something just seems empty/missing. I know time moves on, distractions, other concerns and priorities , more good times and bad times. THE MEMORIES ARE WHAT I HAVE and that's cool. I think of You and Mom everyday. Sometimes I move on or chuckle or smile or cry or just "think".... you never know. Mom was waiting around about 6 months for you. Now you both can look down on me and SMILE, and I will look up and SMILE! As I told Mom on her day, "SAVE A SPOT FOR ME UP THERE."*

*THIS TOO JUST PASSED  
I Love you Dad,  
Kenneth*

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**kenneth kopka** - February 21, 2021 at 08:34 PM

KK

*Kenny, what a beautiful tribute to an amazing man. You and your family are in my thoughts and prayers. Love ya!*

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**Kimberly Kopka** - February 22, 2021 at 10:02 AM

RK

*Sherrie, Lionel, Ken and Barbara thank you all for taking care of your mom, dad, and my brother over many difficult months. I loved your mom and dad as I know they loved me and we had many memorable times over the years. The picture posted and the obituary brought me many tears. Ken's posting was truly heartfelt. I have had many occasions to grieve over my 80 years with the loss of my mother, father, sister Mary and sister Helen and their spouses, your mom and now your father. I guess that now I am the patriarch of the Kopka family. Loss is never easy. God is truly in charge and has called each of them by name to live in eternity with Him. I pray that those of us who remain behind continue to grow in love, faith, hope and trust.*

*Blessings to all of you. Uncle Dick*

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**Richard W Kopka** - February 22, 2021 at 07:52 PM

KK

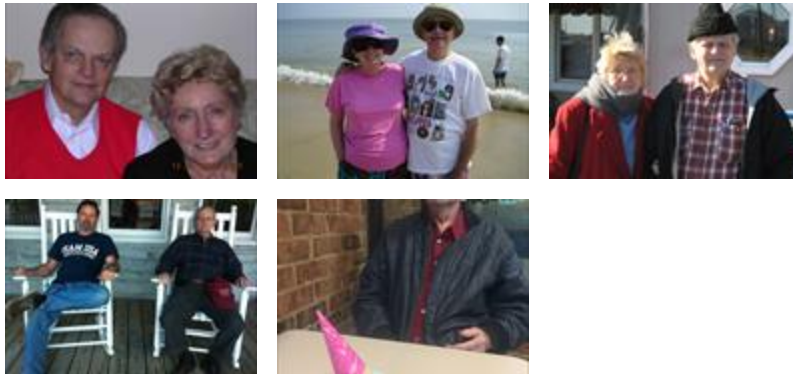
“ 2 files added to the album Joe and Jean Kopka



kenneth kopka - February 21, 2021 at 08:17 PM

KK

“ 16 files added to the album Joe and Jean Kopka



kenneth kopka - February 18, 2021 at 08:42 PM

BM

*Thank you for sending and obit of your dad it's so wonderful to see the faces of dear old friends it brings back many warm memories of the good times spent in Cary in the 70's love betty*

betty mantell - February 19, 2021 at 04:15 PM

KK

*Mrs Mantell, I remember the name for sure.... but the detailed memories of Cary, I forget ... posted up a couple pix of the old house and one with JOE and his beloved 1968 Olds Delta 88*

kenneth kopka - February 21, 2021 at 08:13 PM

KK

*Love all these pictures!!!*

Kimberly Kopka - February 22, 2021 at 10:03 AM

KE

“ 1 file added to the album *Memories Album*



kennedytarheel5 - February 18, 2021 at 01:06 PM

KE

“ 1 file added to the *tribute wall*

kennedytarheel5 - February 18, 2021 at 01:03 PM

KE

“ 1 file added to the *tribute wall*



kennedytarheel5 - February 18, 2021 at 01:02 PM

SK

“ 5 files added to the album Joe and Jean Kopka



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**Sherrie Kennedy** - February 18, 2021 at 11:57 AM