

Donald Lee Schwanke



October 26, 1937 - August 4, 2022

Donald Lee Schwanke 84 of La Feria Texas passed away in Harlingen Texas on August 4th, 2022. Don was born in El Centro, California on October 26th, 1937 to Bessie Mae and Alwin Wilhelm Schwanke. He attended Seaman High School in Kansas. He joined the US Army in 1956, eventually serving in Korea, Vietnam, Germany and the US. He retired from the Army in 1976 and from then until his passing, he pursued new experiences and indulged his passions by doing everything from welding, to building airplanes, inventing, auto repair, home construction, motorcycle riding, big rig driving, Kansas highway patrol and numerous other endeavors.

He was a diligent researcher and compiled a huge quantity of genealogical data. Three of his proudest achievements were gaining his private pilot's license in 1987 and his A&P license in 1991 and he was awarded the Federal Aviation Administration prestigious Wright Brothers "Master Pilot" award for 50 years of safe aviation. Not many folks get this award, as it is signed by the FAA Administrator and entered in the Registry at FAA HQ as a distinguished pilot.

Don was incredibly smart, and if he didn't know something, or how to do something, he would learn, and if you didn't know how to do something, he would teach you. Many people the world over have benefited from his passions for old cars, building airplanes and sharing his knowledge. He was also a strong advocate for fellow veterans and their families, assisting many of them through the cumbersome enrollment process. Don was also a proud member of the EAA, serving as the La Feria Texas chapter 595 president for a number of years.

Don did 5 (or more!) times as much in his lifetime as most people do in one.

Don is survived by his wife Geneda, son Michael (Charmaine) Schwanke of Tennessee, daughter Jennie (Brant) Mendelzon of Texas, stepson Tim Spiess, and step daughters Susan Barber and Ruth Ann Fenimore of Missouri, as well as seven grandchildren, four great grandchildren, sister Edith Plants, brothers Clyde Schwanke and Norman Schwanke, many nieces, nephews and cousins, and was preceded in death by his parents, Alwin and Bessie, as well as his son, Darrin and daughter, Dawna.

A Remembrance and celebration of the life and legacy of Donald Schwanke will be held Friday August 12th, 2022, 2 - 4 PM
Rio Grande Valley Shrine Club
13415 E Expressway 83,
La Feria, TX 78559