



## Harold Robert Kelly

July 27, 1931 - October 18, 2022

NAPA - Harold Robert Kelly, Husband, Father, Steward of the Land, Guardian of the Napa Valley, Community and Christian Leader, went to be with his Lord on October 18, 2022. He was 91, and passed peacefully at home.

Harold was born to Claude H. and Bertha M. (Kujula) Kelly in Bessemer, MI, on July 27, 1931, during the Great Depression. Harold lived in a log cabin, built by his father, on a share-cropping farm they were homesteading. Up through the 6th grade he walked two-and-a-half miles to catch a bus to the two-room schoolhouse. When the farm failed, they eventually moved to International Falls, MN, where he attended Junior High and High School. Being very poor, he worked at many jobs at a young age, to pay for his own clothes and needs. Eventually working at the Paper Mill in that town.

Harold joined the Navy in 1951, and saw the world; The Caribbean, Mediterranean and worked on building Thule Military Base in Greenland.

Harold met Betty Ann Laznicka at a Barn Dance in Minnesota, and they married in 1952, and were married for 66 years until her passing in 2019.

After putting his wife, Betty, through college to become a teacher, Harold left the Navy to get his own college education. He graduated with Honors from the University of Minnesota. After teaching Agricultural Shop classes for a year,

he joined Equitable Life Insurance Agri-Business Investment Division. He moved his young family to Atlantic, IA, where he worked as a Loan Officer to farmers and after four years, was promoted to an executive position in New York City. He moved his family to Waldwick, NJ, and then commuted into New York City every day for four years, which he hated.

Harold then requested a return to the field where he could again work directly with farmers. They told him "Sure, where would you like to go?" He said California. So they offered him Fresno, CA. which he declined (Thank you Lord!)

He found out that there was a new territory opening in Northern California and asked to be transferred there. In 1968, he settled the family in the city of Napa, as it was central to his new territory. At that time there were more prunes, chickens, and cattle in Napa than vineyards.

However, he saw the potential in the wine industry and made loans to start-up vineyard owners and wineries. He was very successful, and many of his clients became the iconic names of the Napa Valley. He had a knack for finding and supporting winners.

He worked from home, which was unusual in the day, therefore more available to his family when needed. He was popular enough with the kids in the neighborhood that, on occasion, there was a knock at the door and a request "Could Mr. Kelly come out and play?"

Often referred to as the "Father of open space," Harold Kelly, was a leader and visionary as a Protector of the Napa Valley, and a slow-growth advocate. He saw how unchecked development had ruined the farmlands of Santa Clara, Silicon Valley and Walnut Creek and did not want it to happen here. So he entered the fight. One of the first organizations that he helped create and

lead was NABOR (Neighborhood Association Of Browns Valley Residents.) which helped create the quality of life that exists in that area now (by stopping a shopping center and townhouses from being built across from Browns Valley School). He continued to live in the Meadowbrook neighborhood until his passing.

He was also a Founding Member of Napa Landmarks in 1974, Founding Board Member of the Napa Land Trust 1976, Served on the Napa Planning Commission 1972-76, and LAFCO, was a Napa City Councilman 1976-80, and helped establish and was First Chairman of Connolly Ranch for Children. A Founding Father and First Director of Ward 2 of the Open Space District, a leader of campaign for Measure J in 1990, and with the Get a Grip on Growth movement. He was a key figure in getting a number of parks established, including Century Oaks, Alston Park, Buhman Park, Westwood Hills, along with many others that were negotiated as concessions from developers to provide future benefits to Napa residents. Other projects he was involved in included Quail Ridge at Berryessa Highlands, Moore Ridge, Archer Taylor Reserve, the Old Bale Mill, the Bay Trail, and many other Land use and community issues.

Harold Kelly also humbly received significant awards and recognition from the California State Assembly and Senate, The U.S. Senate, the Napa Land Trust, the Sierra Club, was presented a KEY to the city of Napa, and has a special bench dedicated to him at Lake Hennessy.

Harold was a man of strong Christian Faith, as a follower of Jesus Christ. He was a past Chairman of the Younlife Committee and helped in the fiscally responsible transfer of the assets of Redwood Community Church to various International Christian Mission organizations. Harold was a visionary in personally contributing to the early funding of numerous impactful Christian

ministries around the world.

His hobbies included gold panning, hiking, playing strategy games with the family, and reading. (He read over 300 books in the last two years on his Kindle!). His mind was sharp to the very end!

He was a very upbeat and optimistic person who realized that time goes by quickly and that we need to make our impact in the world by doing the important work now. He was fond of saying; It was just the other the other day, when in fact 20 or 30 years had gone by.

Husband to Betty Ann (Laznicka) Kelly, who preceded him in death. Father of Gene Kelly (Paula), Dave Kelly (Lisa) and Rena Ann (Kelly) Staley (David). Grandfather to Jacob M. Kelly, Ryan McCleese, Bethany Kelly, Austin Kelly, Ruth Staley, Nathan Staley and Esther Staley.

Pre-deceased by his parents and sister, Lorraine (Kelly) Lancaster. Survived by his sisters and brothers: Laverne (Kelly) Steele, Walter Kelly, Leroy Kelly, Charlotte Porter of International Falls MN; along with numerous nieces and nephews.

A Celebration of Life will be held at the Connolly Ranch on Sunday November 20,2022, at 1:00 p.m. with a reception following. All are welcome. Please come join us.

In lieu of flowers or gifts, Harold asked that we establish a scholarship fund at the Connolly Ranch to support environmental teachers and interns. If you would like to contribute to that fund, you may do so at the Memorial or go to [www.ConnollyRanch.org](http://www.ConnollyRanch.org).

# Previous Events

## Celebration of Life

NOV **20**. 1:00 PM.

Connolly Ranch