



## Obituary

**Born:** Sunday, December 5, 1920

**Died:** Saturday, April 27, 2019

Robert L. Miller, Sr.

Dec. 5, 1920 - April 27, 2019

SOUTH BEND, IN - Robert Lowell Miller, Sr., 98, of South Bend, passed away peacefully Saturday, April 27, 2019 at home. He was the beloved husband of the late Jane Bennett Koontz Miller (1921-1978) and the late Dorothy June Humphreys Miller (1923-1953). He was the cherished father of David D. Meek (Debbie), Robert L. Miller, Jr. (Jane Woodward Miller), Mindy Jane Moore (Tony), Pamela Miller Christian (James), and Lisa Beth Maguire (Jamie). He was the well-loved grandfather of Elizabeth (Shayn Smulyan) and Amanda Miller (Rowan Kelley), Audrey, Della and Kelsey (Ashley) Wagner, Bennett and Olivia Christian, Jane, Anna, Margaret and Katie Maguire, and Vicky (Tom) Edwards. He was the adored great-grandfather of Kristen and Katie Edwards, Isla, Casey and Vada Wagner, and William and Anthony Plank, and great-guardian to Maurice Phillips. He is also survived by his friend and devoted caregiver for three decades, Eva Johnson.

## Service Summary

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### Visitation

2:00 PM to 4:00 PM, Fri May 03, 2019

6:00 PM to 8:00 PM, Fri May 03, 2019

### Cleveland Rd. Location

17033 Cleveland Road  
South Bend, IN 46635

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### Funeral Service

10:00 AM Sat May 04, 2019

### Evangel Heights Methodist Church

114 North Ironwood Drive  
South Bend, IN 46615

Visitation will be held at Welsheimer Family Funeral Home North, 17033 Cleveland Rd., South Bend, IN on Friday, May 3, from 2 pm to 4 pm and again from 6 pm to 8 pm. Funeral Services will be held at Evangel Heights United Methodist Church at 114 N. Ironwood Dr., South Bend, IN on Saturday, May 4, at 10 am. Graveside Services and interment will be held following Funeral Services at 11:30 am at Saint Joseph Valley Memorial Park (200 feet south of the Grape and Cleveland Rd. entrance). A reception will follow at Evangel Height's Fellowship Hall.

In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation to Miller's Vets, 747 South Michigan Street, South Bend, IN 46601.

Robert L. Miller, Sr. was an exceptional man. His mind worked 24 hours a day, forever thinking about ways to solve problems - ways to make life easier, not only for those around him, but for his fellow man as well. Right up until the day he died, when he should have been resting and taking it easy, our dad chose to get up every morning and work to grow Rising Improvements, a little company he started in 2014 with the mission of creating mobility aids designed to help people remain independent longer and better. He worked tirelessly with engineers, attorneys and manufacturing companies, creating prototypes, obtaining patents and trademarks, arranging for molds and making products. Our dad just kept on going and we - his children - well understood the reason for this. He told us many times that his mother's

most prized life lesson was, "You're allowed to fail. But you're never allowed to quit." And he didn't.

Our dad loved learning new things - how to sell on Amazon.com, how to use YouTube videos to make a sales pitch, and the art of doing business with China. He delighted in using technology to further his goals. He was thrilled to participate in important meetings through teleconferencing, never having to leave the comfort of his home and the familiarity of his basement office. Our dad was old-school in his values, but he made sure he was on the cutting edge of every opportunity that helped him get the job done.

Before Rising Improvements, in his 80's, again during a stage of life when, by all accounts, our dad should have been resting and taking life easy, his life was altered one day when he opened up a South Bend (Indiana) Tribune to a photo of what he thought was a homeless Veteran sleeping on an abandoned trucking terminal platform on an 18 degree winter day. To him, this was a travesty and he determined to do something about it. So in 2009, he founded Miller's Vets, a drill team of selected homeless Veterans in South Bend, Indiana. His idea was to get these men and women back in uniform, and offer them renewed spirit and enhanced self-esteem by providing opportunities to re-learn and then display advanced skills of close order drill participation in honor and color guard performances all over the community.

For his determination to implement the program, and for its overwhelming success, our dad was awarded Volunteer of the Year through the Center for the Homeless that same year. The following year, in 2010, he founded "The Last Salute," a program whereby Miller's Vets perform a full Military Funeral with all Military Honors including the 21 Volley Rifle Salute; ceremonial folding and presentation of the American Flag; and the sounding of Taps for Veterans who have no family, church or Veterans organization to assist them with funeral plans.

Also in 2010, still seeing more to be done, our dad founded Miller's Vets Garden of Peace, a section of 65 burial plots in the cemetery behind Portage Manor in South Bend that serves as a final resting place for Veterans who otherwise would not be given proper burials after they die.

One short year later, in 2011, The Robert L. Miller, Sr. Veteran's Center at 747 S. Michigan Street was dedicated after our dad purchased the building and cheered on renovations which produced a beautiful facility that, today, 24 Veterans call home. The Veteran's Center, which is a Division of the South Bend Center for the Homeless, helps Veterans without a home receive treatment and therapy as they transition back into society after serving our country. On Veterans Day 2015, a beautiful new recreational facility for homeless Veterans who were staying, or who had stayed at

the Robert L. Miller, Sr. Veterans Center, was dedicated.

But for as much as he did for our local Veterans, our dad always wanted them to have more. He believed these worthy Veterans were just as entitled to have the beautiful flag of our nation honoring them by flying at half-staff as are government officials or other famous wealthy citizens. He knew that without our Veterans, there would be no freedom to permit us to live life, enjoy liberty and to pursue happiness. So he spent six years crafting his "Half-staff for Veterans" program and was rewarded for his diligence when, in July of last year, Indiana Governor Eric Holcomb granted his wish and issued a proclamation allowing the American Flag to be flown at half-staff for all deceased Veterans in St. Joseph County on Patriot Day (9/11), Veterans Day and Memorial Day of each year.

Between Miller's Vets in his 80's, and Rising Improvements in his 90's, our dad made amazing contributions to the world around him. But what is it that prompts a man to literally give up his retirement, to get up every morning and sit down at his desk to work after a lifetime of doing just that? For our dad, it is about character. As Helen Keller once said, character isn't developed in ease and quiet. She said trial and suffering is the catalyst for a strengthened soul; a cleared vision, an inspired ambition and achieved success. Many who knew our dad personally had the opportunity to observe how ingenuity, innovation and a keen survival instinct enabled him to overcome the trial and suffering that were visited upon him throughout various periods in his life.

Born December 5, 1920, our dad grew up during the Great Depression in the small rural town of Wilkinson in Hancock County, Indiana. The family moved to Indianapolis when he was nine years old. Two years later, the death of his father left the family in abject poverty. To make ends meet, our dad's mom, our grandmother, took in boarders and roomers and also, throughout the week, baked and sold Parker House Rolls, small rolls folded over just once. In a Model T Ford his brother Earl was able to purchase for just \$15, our dad, by now in high school, delivered his mother's delicious bread on Saturdays, two dozen rolls for a quarter.

Our dad excelled in football at Shortridge High School. It was the late 1930's. The football season in his senior year had just ended when he received a surprising invitation from Mike Layden who routinely refereed Indianapolis High School football games. Our dad, along with his football coach, was invited to have dinner at the apartment of Mr. Layden. Following dinner, Mr. Layden made a phone call to his brother, Elmer, who also happened to be the Coach of Notre Dame's Football Program. After some discussion, Elmer instructed his brother to extend a Notre Dame Football ride to our dad, which he readily and gratefully accepted. It changed his life forever. The following September, 1938, our

dad packed his things and moved up to South Bend where he made his home with his brother Earl and Earl's wife, Helen, while he attended classes.

Coach Layden chose to put our dad in the position of guard, which was exactly what he played in high school. But instead of his high school Warner system where he just blocked left, right or straight ahead, Notre Dame used a T formation where the guards dropped back, turned and led the plays. Our dad just never became proficient - too many sprained ankles. So, after a year, he lost his coveted scholarship.

Determined NOT to move back to Indianapolis without a college degree, our dad worked with Coach Layden to figure out a way to stay at Notre Dame. At first, the coach offered him the opportunity to transfer his scholarship to three different schools, Purdue University being one. But going to Purdue would mean our dad would have to repeat his freshmen year, as the first year of Notre Dame credits were heavily Catholic courses and those wouldn't transfer. Our grandmother was quite sick at the time. Our dad explained to Coach Layden that he feared being away from her for an extra year. So the coach helped line up several part time jobs our dad could do to pay his tuition and cover his costs at Notre Dame.

The biggest money-maker of the jobs our dad did to pay his way through school was selling corsages to women at the stadium on game day. Every Saturday for home games, our dad would get up at 6 a.m. and hitch a ride with a friend to a flower farm in Buchanan, Michigan, just about 35 minutes from campus, and buy a load of beautiful golden yellow Dahlias. He'd fashion them into corsages and sell them outside the stadium. His favorite story is what he charged. If he could get the corsage pinned on the woman before the price was asked, it was 50 cents. Otherwise, it was a quarter. His thinking was, who is going to make their mother or wife or girlfriend take off a corsage because it's too expensive?

Another job the coach arranged for our dad was to roll out Notre Dame's tennis courts with great big steel rollers filled with water to keep them smooth. For his meals, our dad mopped the floors in the dining hall every morning. Another job he held was working in the library putting books back and that gave him credits toward tuition.

Then the new airport in South Bend opened and our dad, along with George Stratigos, a dear friend and classmate of his at Notre Dame, were able to secure a concession business whereby they made and sold hamburgers. Our dad often liked to joke that George ate up all the profits.

Yet another business our dad engaged in was storing the furniture and other possessions of college students in the summer. He liked to tell us that an extra bonus from that job

was when a student ended up not claiming his belongings in the fall for one reason or another which meant that our dad was then entitled to sell them, which provided additional money to make ends meet.

One of the greatest lessons our dad handed down to us was the result of an experience he had on the Notre Dame campus so long ago. A wealthy fellow student asked our dad one day if he would like to accompany him and his father to lunch and our dad readily agreed. As the three were walking across the parking lot, our dad spotted a penny on the ground. Too proud to stop and pick it up, he walked on by, sick to his stomach that the coin was on the pavement and not in his pocket. His friend's dad put a firm hand on our dad's shoulder, turned him around and walked him back to the penny. He said, "Pick it up, Robert. That's the easiest one percent of a dollar you'll ever earn."

After graduating from Notre Dame in 1942 with an accounting degree, our dad was commissioned as an Ensign in the United States Navy and ordered to Harvard University Business School for training as a Supply Corps Officer. In 1944, he was ordered aboard the U.S.S. Essex CV-9, a fast attack aircraft carrier in the South Pacific, upon which he served through five major campaign battles until the end of the war. As a Battery Officer of a quad 40 MM anti-aircraft gun, he was wounded by one of two Japanese suicide kamikazes who crashed his ship. His awards include the Purple Heart, Combat Medal and nine additional metals and commendations.

Our dad didn't come back from WWII without some baggage. To this day, when it's stormy, he feels especially good. On stormy days, the Japanese suicide kamikazes were unable to fly over the fleet and crash his ship. He said the only time that he could sleep soundly and write letters home was during storms. After he got home, he never saw a storm he did not love.

In September 1945, our dad returned to Notre Dame Law School, graduating Cum Laude in 1947 with his Doctor of Jurisprudence Degree. He practiced law before being recalled to active-duty for the Korean War. After retiring as a Lieutenant Commander in the Naval Reserves in 1953, our dad returned to the general practice of law.

There is no way possible to cover all of our dad's many lifetime contributions in the course of this obituary. But we would like to hit on some quick highlights to help complete the picture of who he was and what he's accomplished.

In 1964, our dad was elected as the Republican Congressional Candidate from the Third District, running with Presidential Candidate Barry Goldwater. He was subsequently appointed as the 4th judge of the St. Joseph

Superior Court. Our dad was extremely active in civic and Masonic work, elected as a President of the Exchange Club, served for more than 20 years as Secretary of the Salvation Army Advisory Board, and was a perennial leader in Veterans functions and associations.

Our dad was a renowned Masonic Scholar and Author, having written two of the 29 Scottish Rite Degrees. He served for 12 years as the Active 33rd Degree Deputy, headed more than 50,000 32nd Degree Masons in Indiana and, for many years, was the Dean of the Directors of the 15 state Northern Masonic Jurisdiction.

Our father's awards and honors include the Guardian of Freedom Trophy (Military Cadets of Notre Dame); Scottish Rite Supreme Counsel "Medal of Honor"; Sagamore of the Wabash recipient; and Indiana Council of Deliberation "Medal of Honor."

Other accomplishments we are so proud of include being admitted to South Bend, Indiana, Hall of Fame in 2010; receiving Notre Dame's esteemed Rev. William Corby, C.S.C. Award in 2011; being awarded Lifetime Membership in the "University of Notre Dame 1842 Loyalty Society" in 2011; and receiving the Hoosier Lifetime Achievement Award in 2013.

And all the while, our dad was an AMAZING father, grandfather and great-grandfather. He was extremely generous with his money and with his time and especially with his wisdom. He helped all of his children and grandchildren with his level head and smart advice. He never said "no" when we asked for help. He was always there for us. It's very difficult to accept that he is no longer with us physically. The way our dad chose to live his life - the countless contributions he made to the world around him - ensures that his memory and spirit will live on through all of us who loved him so dearly.