

William J. O'Neill



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William (Bill) J. O’Neill died peacefully on July 5, after a brief bout with cancer. Born May 16, 1938, to Jack and Julia O’Neill and raised on a fruit farm in Red Hook, NY, Bill went on to graduate from Red Hook High School (‘56), Brown University (‘60), and Duke Law School (‘63). He remained active with all 3 alumni associations to promote higher education and community.

He was appointed a special agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 1963, serving for 8 years in North Carolina during the height of the Civil Rights Era. During that time, he married Mary Belliveau (nee Witter) and welcomed three children: Elizabeth, Daniel, and Adam. Upon their divorce, Bill and Mary relocated the family to Red Hook where they remained lifelong friends and coparents with Mary’s husband Jim. Upon his return to NY, Bill was hired by the Honorable Albert Rosenblatt as an Assistant District Attorney in Dutchess County. He married Mary Zane Hawkins in 1979 and together they raised Kama Borquist (nee Hawkins) and Alec O’Neill in Red Hook. Mary O’Neill, then the appointed Chief Clerk for Ulster County, died in 1996 following a courageous battle with cancer.

Bill re-married in 1997, welcoming Jean Riale (nee Pellegrino) and children Christopher and Stephanie into the expansive O’Neill family. He retired from the District Attorney’s office on December 30, 2002, concluding an impressive 31-year career as an outstanding trial lawyer as well as being instrumental in the training and development of many young attorneys. He then joined his long-time friend Jim O’Neil’s law firm part-time, from which he fully retired in 2012. He then turned his full attention to Red Hook, serving as the appointed Chief Deputy of the town and being instrumental in the preservation of farmland and public spaces in Red Hook. He was elected four-times to the Town Board until 2021.

He truly thought more of others than himself, evidenced by his engaging one-on-one discussions and thoughtful letters, cards, and book summaries that encouraged and inspired each lucky recipient. He will be sorely missed, but revered forever for the blessing he was to all who knew him.

He is preceded in death by father Jack O'Neill, mother Julia Tobin O'Neill, sister Claire O'Neill Carr, brother John T. O'Neill, and granddaughter Natalie O'Neill.

He is survived by his loving wife Jean O’Neill of Poughkeepsie; his children Elizabeth (Walter) Avis of Red Hook, Daniel (Maria) O’Neill of Woodstock, CT, Adam (Jeri Lea) O’Neill of Nashville, TN, Alec (Jessica) O’Neill of Philadelphia, PA; his stepchildren Kama (Eric) Borquist of Hyde Park, NY, Christopher (Sarah) Riale of South Orange, NJ, and Stephanie Riale of Poughkeepsie, NY; his grandchildren Ian, Maxwell, Isabel, Emily, William, Audrey, Levi, Arden, Rosemary, Danielle, Trevor, Hudson, and Bradyn; his great grandchildren Natalie, Jack, Daisy, and Thumbelina O’Neill of Woodstock, CT, and Verona, Llewyn, and Mabel O’Neill of Cambridge, NY; sister-in-law Sandy O’Neill, brother-in-law Geoffrey Carr, and several nephews and nieces.

Relatives and friends are invited to call at Burnett & White Funeral Home, 7461 S. Broadway, Red Hook, NY on Friday, July 12, from 4pm to 7pm. A funeral will be held at St. John’s Reformed Church, 126 Old Post Rd N., Upper Red Hook, NY, on Saturday, July 13 at 10 a.m. Interment will follow at St. John’s Reformed Church cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the Red Hook Alumni Association.

Arrangements are under the care of Burnett & White Funeral Homes, 7461 S. Broadway, Red Hook, NY.

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