



Henry "Hank" J. Naasko

July 14, 1941 - July 9, 2023

Henry Jay Naasko, known to all as Hank, lived just shy of 82 joy-filled years, from July 14, 1941, to July 9, 2023. Hank was an ardent optimist and a person of many passions, able to find the good in anyone and anything, his enthusiasms always genuine, never sullied by irony. His departure leaves a hole in the world as large as his outsized and charismatic personality.

Born to George and Sigrid Naasko, Hank grew up in Canton, Michigan, with his brother, George, who died when Hank was just 7 years old, and his younger sister, Mary, when Canton was no bustling suburb but a small farming community with a one room schoolhouse. As a young man, he discovered his love for music, and this self-described "country bumpkin" left home in 1959 to study vocal music at the University of Michigan. He trained to be a music educator and conductor, sang with the Gilbert and Sullivan Society, and, most importantly, joined the Men's Glee Club as a freshman. To the end of his days, he credited his travels with the Glee Club around the United States and Europe with transforming his life by exposing him to new cultures and cuisines, to different histories and ideas. Hank graduated from Michigan with his Bachelor of Music degree in 1964 and followed that with a Master of Music degree seven years later.

After graduation, Hank began a long and distinguished career as a teacher of music and history in the Livonia public schools. Having had his own life

changed by education, he set about changing the lives of others through it. His choir at Frost Junior High performed at the national bicentennial festivities at The White House for President Gerald Ford and his choir at Churchill High School performed at the inauguration of President George H.W. Bush; his musical theater productions at Churchill were legendary. His students' parents became devoted boosters, and his former students tracked him down long into his retirement to thank him for his impact on them. As a history teacher, he was equally creative and enthusiastic. He found ways to bring history alive, combining his love of food with his love for the past by having his students recreate recipes from historical cookbooks.

In 1968, Hank married Sandra — despite having arrived to meet her parents riding a motorcycle and sporting a scruffy red beard. It was his life's best decision. They had three daughters: Sarah, Heidi, and Rachel. Since Sandy was also a music teacher, theirs was a household of singing and music, of band camps and halftime shows and recitals, and of carpool karaoke long before that was a thing. He was also a warm and loving brother-in-law to Sharry and Sally, and uncle to Aaron, Jeremy, Becky, Robin, Petr and Lara. Hank's family was truly the joy of his life. He led his seven grandchildren, as he once had his daughters, nieces and nephews, on waterfall adventures in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, and he delighted in conducting the burgeoning Naasko Family Singers on annual Christmas carol outings that might include the houses of neighbors, nursing homes, or downtown bars and restaurants. Proud of his Finnish heritage, he regularly attended the reunions of his mother's extended Kangas family, and for nearly a quarter century he conducted the Finnish American Singers of Michigan in twice-yearly concerts and performances at FinnFests.

Hank's passions outside of family and music started with UM football but also ran a long gamut. He was a season ticket holder for some sixty years, and for decades of that he could count on the fingers of one hand the number of

home games he had missed, a figure made up for many times over by roadtrips to away games and bowl games. But the game was only part of it, as he and Sandy tailgated with a group of their close friends, and when Sandy stopped attending the games, Hank would invite a daughter or grandchild or son-in-law to join him. He and Sandy were skilled and generous entertainers, whether for their bridge groups or Hank's cast parties or the weekly family dinner that brought together their adult children and grandchildren. Hank was a raconteur, an avid gardener, a cook who loved a new recipe as much as his heavily-annotated old ones, a garage sale devotee, a car lover who in his summers took long-distance test drives for Ford and in later years loved tooling around Ann Arbor in his red Mustang convertible, and a man who adored—adored—Christmas, the ornaments and trees and lights and music and the Finnish anise-seed doughnuts and the unbridled, unapologetic joy of the holiday. Hank Naasko loved life and loved people, and he was always grateful for both.

A gathering will be held at Sarah's home at 1571 W. Liberty St., Ann Arbor MI, 48103 on Saturday, July 15 from 2:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M. There is limited parking onsite; please reserve driveway parking for those with limited mobility. Alternate parking available nearby on Virginia Ave. Please note that ascending several steps is necessary to enter the home.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be held at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church at 2250 E Stadium Blvd, Ann Arbor, MI 48104 on Monday, July 17 at 11:00 A.M. Fr. James Conlon as Celebrant. To honor Hank's love of the University of Michigan at these events, we invite you to join us wearing Michigan regalia or Hank's favorite colors: maize, blue, or white.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations to be made to the Finnish Center Association (<https://finnishcenter.org/fcc-donation>) or the Henry J.

Naasko Family Scholarship Fund, a newly created endowment to support Michigan Glee Club students (<https://donate.umich.edu/gMyjW>) (Checks made out to "University of Michigan" with "Men's Glee Club Fund - 362611" in the Memo line. Mail to: Attn. Rose Martus, School of Music, Theater & Dance Advancement, 2005 Baits Dr, Ann Arbor, MI 48109) To leave a memory you have of Hank or for directions please visit www.rbfhsaline.com.

Previous Events

Visitation

JUL 17. 10:30 AM - 11:00 AM (ET)

St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church
2250 E Stadium Blvd.
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

Mass of Christian Burial

JUL 17. 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM (ET)

St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church
2250 E Stadium Blvd.
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

Tribute Wall



“ Henry "Hank" J. Naasko

October 23, 2023 at 01:07 PM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Henry "Hank" J. Naasko.

August 30, 2023 at 01:06 AM



“ Florist Choice Bouquet was purchased for the family of Henry "Hank" J. Naasko.



August 30, 2023 at 01:06 AM



“ *It is with a heavy heart that I received the news of Mr. Naasko's passing. Reflecting on his life, I am overwhelmed by the profound impact he had on me as both a cherished friend and an extraordinary teacher. The memories I hold of him and our time together with the Tudor Singers are deeply cherished, forever ingrained in the tapestry of my life's journey.*

Meeting Mr. Naasko proved to be a pivotal moment that forever altered the trajectory of my existence. I was a timid middle schooler transitioning from a Catholic school environment, and stepping into Frost Jr. High left me feeling like an outsider. Joining the choir was a leap of faith, and against all odds, I secured a spot—a remarkable feat for a seventh grader back then. The memory of my audition, where I sang my heart out and encountered Grace Durand, a friend I hold close to this day, remains vivid.

Mr. Naasko's presence radiated an undeniable magnetism, drawing students to him with an irresistible charm. The choir's bond was so profound that we formed a unique home room, arriving at school an hour ahead of everyone else just to bask in his guidance and camaraderie.

Thanks to Hank Naasko, the anthems of football's Big 10 universities are etched into my memory. Our collective efforts in selling candles, washing cars, and organizing fundraisers culminated in a transformative journey to Europe. That inaugural choir trip holds a special place in my heart, every detail etched in my mind, including the mishap of forgetting the pitch pipe. The fun and opportunities he gifted us with will forever resonate. For reasons unbeknownst to me, he saw potential in me and entrusted me with initiating a phone committee for our travel communications. His faith in my abilities left me humbled and honored, a sentiment I believe he bestowed upon each one of us. Mr. Naasko possessed a unique ability to make everyone feel exceptional, leaving an indelible mark on our souls. The experience of singing in that choir stands as one of the most profound privileges

I've ever known, fostering enduring friendships that continue to enrich my life.

Hank Naasko embodied the epitome of humanity's finest qualities—a remarkable individual and an exemplary man. Gratitude fills my heart for the privilege of knowing him and being counted among his students. He embodied excellence in its purest form, and his legacy will forever shine as a beacon of inspiration.

Jill Lee - August 30, 2023 at 12:59 AM



The Big 10's fight songs! Yes, thanks for reminding me of that Jill.

Craig Brown - August 30, 2023 at 09:07 AM



“ *Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Henry "Hank" J. Naasko.*



July 19, 2023 at 10:49 AM



“ *Mr. Naasko taught myself my brother and a sister at Frost junior high. I remember learning so many school fight songs, and still know most of them to this day. He was one of the best teachers I ever had, and definitely the best choir/music teacher. He appreciated the fact that my brother sister and I could read music. I was in the Bel Canto choir under his direction. Thanks to Mr. Nasco I learn to site read. As a student, I never knew all of these wonderful things about him that I just read. I only know what a wonderful teacher he was. my condolences.*

Nancy Kelly - July 15, 2023 at 04:15 PM

ST

At Frost Jr High, Mr Naasco could really make us sound so good. He made us blend and breathe together. We sang Madrigals in Tudor Singers and I particularly loved The Silver Swan (second soprano). I will sing it in my heart today. Mr Naasco was one of the best teachers I ever had.

Sharon Salisbury Thompson - September 03, 2023 at 01:00 PM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Henry "Hank" J. Naasko.

July 14, 2023 at 03:00 PM



“ Be My Love Bouquet with Red Roses was purchased for the family of Henry "Hank" J. Naasko.



July 14, 2023 at 03:00 PM

AK

“ Mr. Naasko was an amazing teacher. He believed in each and every one of us, and showed us a tremendous amount of love and respect. Thanks to him, I know the fight song to every Big 10 school (well, the schools that were in the Big 10 back in the '90s!), and find learning about history to be a thrill. You'll be missed by many, Mr. Naasko!

Amy Keller - July 14, 2023 at 09:47 AM

BD

“ Fortunately, I taught with Hank at Frost Junior High and Churchill High School. And he was my son’s Social Studies teacher at Holmes Middle School. Hank was a force of nature, always totally engaged with his classes. My art room was across the hall from his and we often heard the magical music that came out of his room. All of us were lucky to have our paths cross his. If we could sum up all that he was, it would be simply be that he did his best and touched our souls.

Barb Demgen

Barb Demgen - July 14, 2023 at 07:20 AM

KM

“ I got my earliest start in choral singing under Henry Naasko in the Livonia Youth Choir which rehearsed at Frost Middle School from the 6th to the 10th grades (1973-1978). Mr. Naasko was a kind generous and spirited individual who helped instill in me both a love for singing and for University of Michigan football, both of which persist in me to this day at nearly age 62.

Kim Millard - July 13, 2023 at 01:05 PM