



## Obituary

**Born:** Thursday, April 4, 1935

**Died:** Thursday, April 4, 2019

George Alan (Al) Shaler, of Easthampton, MA and Warrensburg, NY passed away on his 84th birthday. Al was born April 4th, 1935 in Freeport, NY to George Wiltse and Mary Sue (Gillaspy) Shaler. An only child, Al grew up on Long Island, becoming an accomplished pianist and organist, excelling in academics and in running. During his youth, he spent many vacations on his maternal grandparents' farm in Benton, PA doing farm chores and developing a profound appreciation for the outdoors.

As a teen, his parents sent him Forest Lake Camp (FLC) in Warrensburg, NY, a transformative event in his young life. While at FLC, Al was exposed to outdoor adventures the likes of which he had never encountered on Long Island. He returned for several summers, becoming a counselor and head counselor at the Camp, and more importantly growing to love the Adirondacks of northern NY.

## Service Summary

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### Celebration of Life

1:30 PM Sat May 04, 2019

**Williston-Northampton Chapel**

After graduating from Freeport High School in 1953, Al matriculated at Hamilton College in Clinton, NY in the fall of 1953. While at Hamilton, Al once again shined in the classroom and on various cross-country courses throughout upstate NY. In his sophomore year, Al won the cross-country New York state championship. Al found great pleasure in playing the organ at Hamilton and developed a lifelong love for the instrument.

Upon graduation, he headed off to the University of Wisconsin at Madison to pursue a graduate degree in English. While in Madison, he met Janet Ann James, an undergraduate from nearby Berlin, WI. They would start dating in Al's second year, became engaged shortly thereafter and were married in 1960.

Al received his Masters in 1959 and after a short job search landed a job at then Williston Academy in Easthampton. He would end up teaching at Williston Academy, later the Williston Northampton School (WNS), from 1959 through 1999. While at WNS he taught many courses in literature, including a course he created, Dissident Voices, which

focused on African-American writers such as Richard Wright and James Baldwin, the first class of its kind at WNS. A passionate amateur chef, he also taught cooking classes which were enthusiastically attended.

Similar to other WNS teachers, Al was also a coach for the school's athletic program. He started out coaching football and track, and by the early 1960s had started the cross-country program. Al coached many aspiring runners and put them through many a rigorous workout. He would often show up in the middle of woods and exhort his runners, telling them to pick up the pace, and lending some timely, and sometimes off color encouragement. In the fall of 1980, his team won the New England championships.

The WNS community meant a lot to Al, most importantly, after his wife died in 1973.

Despite this tremendous loss, he pushed on raising his three young children, enjoying a great high school teaching career at Williston, touching the lives of thousands of young people in the classroom and on the playing fields during his 40 year teaching career (the only job he ever had), and making countless friends. His children, George, Jim and Elizabeth graduated from WNS in 1980, 1981, and 1984 respectively.

Al loved playing the organ at the Williston Chapel. He often played the organ during ecumenical services and was in great demand for religious services, holiday musical programs and weddings, at Williston and all over the Pioneer Valley.

Al was active in local theatre. He had starring roles in productions staged at WNS and by the Easthampton Community Theatre Association. These productions allowed Al to show off his big personality, his comedic skills and musical gifts.

Later in his WNS career, he was granted the school's first sabbatical which enabled him to live and work abroad. He used the opportunity to teach for a half year in some of Great Britain's finest secondary schools. The experience of living abroad spurred his growing interest in foreign travel, a passion which was to continue well into his retirement years.

WNS was not the only thing that defined him. He was active in local politics, serving as the Easthampton Town Moderator for several years and later as a city councilor after the city changed its charter. One of his proudest achievements as councilor was being part of the Council efforts to build the current Public Safety Complex. He never grew tired of saying how proud he was of that building.

Al was also appointed a trustee of the University of Massachusetts during the mid-1970s by then Governor Francis Sargent, an undertaking he took very seriously.

During the mid-1960s, Al bought some property on Kelm Lake near Forest Lake Camp and built a rustic A-Frame cabin that at the time was only reachable by rowing across the Lake. For the first ten years Al owned the cabin, the place did not have electricity. He would listen to his beloved Red Sox on a battery operated radio, sometimes not sure if they had won when the reception cut out.

This rustic lifestyle suited him. He would cook the family dinners over a wood fire, using certain hard woods for various cuts of meat for added flavor. Rain or shine, Al would spend his summers by his wood fire, carefully attending to his culinary creations. He and his beloved neighbor and friend Bob Murray, another school teacher from Long Island, would swap many a good story, some not suited for print, sharing martinis, while Al smoked his ever present pipe.

He enjoyed a 20 year retirement traveling all over the world, sometimes in some unusual ways, once taking a month long ocean freighter ride around the coast of South America. Al was fond of many places, but relished a chance to visit Morocco, Spain, Kenya and Britain.

However, what he enjoyed most was spending time at his cabin in the Adirondacks of northern NY. This was his hermitage where he would go for six to seven months each year during his retirement, accompanied by his dog - always a beagle. When he felt a need to leave his cabin, which was not often, sometimes he would venture down to Saratoga to watch the horse races.

Early in his retirement, he threw his energies into cultivating day lilies. He became fascinated with hybridizing day lilies. He transformed his yard into a nursery of sorts. He became a part-time licensed nursery man and sold his hybrids in various hemerocallis publications. People drove from near and far to purchase his plants.

Al is survived by his son George and spouse Jill Rosenthal of Portland, ME, son James and spouse Ann of Tampa FL, and daughter Elizabeth of New York, NY; grandchildren Cole, Griffith, and Wallace Shaler, and Jonna and Shay Rosenthal.

A celebration of life will be held on May 4th at the Williston-Northampton Chapel in Easthampton at 1:30. More details will be posted on the Mitchell Funeral Home web site in the coming week.

In lieu of flowers and donations, please direct any contributions to the Williston-Northampton School in Al's name.