

Thomas J. Wagoner



Thomas J. Wagoner was born January 28, 1909 to Kathryn (Langan) and Arthur Wagoner at the family home in Wood River, where he resided all of his life. His grandfather, Thomas Langan walked to Nebraska from Pittston PA. He acquired part of the family farm from the Union Pacific in 1882. Arthur Wagoner was a Pharmacist and had a Drug Store in Wood River for years. The Pharmacy at the Grand Island Clinic is named for him.

Tom was the oldest grandchild, so he spent lots of time with his grandparents. At an early age he was seen riding his pony about town doing errands for his Grandmother, which included delivering the fresh homemade butter to Father Lynch every Thursday.

At an early age he began attending livestock auctions with his Grandfather and Uncles, an activity he enjoyed throughout his life. Dad told the stories of the large horse sales going on round the clock during World War I and moving the horses on foot from Wood River to the east sale barn in Grand Island, going down 4th Street in Grand Island. At an early age Dad had aspirations of being a real cowboy, but his Father, Arthur, meant Dad one night and told him he was not supposed to go near the horses, but was supposed to do his chores and then his school work. Dad obeyed his father, but he retained his love for a good horse. Dad graduated from Wood River High School with the class of 1926.

One Friday during Lent, while attending Friday night devotions with his friend, Owen Knight, they spotted two new young girls several pews ahead. They followed them uptown to see who they were. Cecelia Burns was in Wood River that weekend to spend her birthday with her grandmother, Hattie & John Steiger. Tom & Cecelia were married on June 18, 1934 at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Wood River.

They experienced the hardships of the "dirty 30's" as they watched the winds blow and the crops dry up. Dad took jobs off the farm to save the farms. He worked for Kansas-Nebraska Gas putting in the pipeline for natural gas and worked on the construction of Lincoln Highway (Highway 30). For entertainment Tom and Cecelia, Mildred & Curly O'Kane, Cleo & Alice Smith, Tom & Alice Langan and Harold and Otis Hofrichter would get together for an evening of pitch.

When World War II was declared Tom went to sign up for service, but he was not accepted because he had lost part of his right hand in a farm accident. So, Tom stayed home to do the farming, using Prisons of War to do part of the manual farm work. During the 1940's he meant Jessie Soto and began raising sugar beets.

They raised their family at the edge of Wood River. We had the best of both worlds. Tom, Dennis and Dan had the farm chores, including milking and helping with the livestock and the crops, while Mary Frances and Judy helped with chores around the house and when an extra hand was needed. We had pets, and room for ball games. Dad and Mom provided a home filled with love and caring for us.

In 1982 AK SAR BEN honored Tom and his brother John and their families for being a 100-year Nebraska Farm family. He was active in the farming operation until after his 90th Birthday. Dad enjoyed family gatherings and looked forward to the visits of his children and grandchildren. He was proud of his Grandchildren's achievements and encouraged them to do their best.

Some of the saddest times in Dad's life were when his family were called to military duty. He was proud of their service, but he said lots of prayers for their safe return. His brother John was a pilot in China in WW II, son Dennis served in Viet Nam, and grandson Mick took part in Desert Storm and Samolia. Tom was an Officer in the Navy and Dan served in Italy. A proud moment was when Shawn graduated from West Point.

He was an active member of St. Mary's Catholic Church. Dad's faith was very important to him. He was also a member of the Knights of Columbus and the Eagles.

Friends will remember Tom reminiscing and sharing the fruits of his labor. In the fall he would be seen about town in his brown pickup delivering sweet corn etc.

Tom was survived by his wife, Cecelia, two daughters, Mary Frances & Richard Moffett of Cairo, Judy Wagoner of Grand Island, three sons, Thomas A. Wagoner & Adele Swihart of Grand Island, Dennis & Jane Wagoner, Daniel & Marlene Wagoner of Wood River, and grandchildren, Major Thomas A. (Mick) & Susan Wagoner, Camp Pendleton CA, Darren & Kristen Wagoner, Council Bluffs IA, Nicolette Wagoner, New York, NY, Kathryn Wagoner, Chicago IL, Tisha Wagoner, Kearney NE, 2nd Lt Shawn Wagoner, Fort Knox, KY, Sarah Emery, Omaha, Deanna Wagoner, Lawrence KS, Patrick Wagoner, Simon Wagoner, Tyson Wagoner & Sonya Wagoner of Wood River, and two great-granddaughters, Audrey (daughter of Mick & Sue) and Mallori (daughter of Darren and Kristen).