

Perry Clark Huston



Out on a hike with his grandsons one day, Perry Huston got a bit ahead and started dropping coins along the trail. The chirps of delight as Dylan and Evan found the coins brought back fond memories for his daughter, Holly Krueger. When she was growing up, Perry was the dad who always sought out adventure and strived to bring joy into his kids' lives. Now, he was doing the same for his grandkids. "He was the best grandfather because he was a big kid himself," Holly says. Adventure has always been part of Perry's life.

Born Jan. 4, 1933, on a farm in northern Missouri, he grew up mostly in Rolla, Missouri. His mother, Delia (Purdy) Huston was a homemaker and his father, Clark Watson Huston, was a highway patrolman back in what Holly calls the "Bonnie and Clyde days." Perry grew up hearing wild stories of his dad's days on patrol and still loves law enforcement tales, such as police shows on TV.

Perry was popular, a good-looking boy with an excellent singing voice. During the summers, he would often go to his mother's family farm and play with his cousins. The rest of the year he had a happy small-town existence with his sister, Janet. Perry was the captain of the football team and played piano in a band.

When he went to the University of Missouri, his fraternity nominated him for a Homecoming King-like contest called "Jack of Hearts." Since his fraternity then burned down in a fire, Perry stood on top of a fire truck to campaign. He won. At college, Perry also won over his first wife, Kathryn Roth.

They married in 1955, within about three months of meeting each other, and later moved to Chicago. A pre-med major, Perry found medical school wasn't for him and went to work as a pharmaceutical representative. The couple had daughter Holly in 1956 and son Tracy two years later. "They were real fun-loving," Holly says of her parents. They had a lot of friends and parties with other families in the area. The house was also full of animals – dogs, cats and fish to name a few.

While Perry may not have been a "change-your-diaper" kind of guy, he made a point to take the kids out on adventures on the weekend to give their mother a break and to just have some fun. Holly remembers in later years going horseback riding and boating with her dad.

In the early '60s, the family moved to Kansas City so Perry could do an apprenticeship with his father-in-law in art conservation. While Perry finally found a career he was passionate about, the time was also one of transition for the family. Perry and Kay got divorced and Perry moved to Fort Worth, where he would go on to become a nationally renowned conservator.

In 1971, he began working for the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth and then started his own preservation company. A year after Perry's move, his kids Holly and Tracy moved to Fort Worth to live with him. Perry got a lake house and loved to take the kids boating, driving and hiking up in the mountains. He nurtured his love of "miniature war games," which involved intricately decorated miniature lead soldiers and days-long tournaments with what Holly affectionately calls "war nerds."

Perry also thrived in his career. Collections around the country sought his expertise, and his firm won a government contract to restore more than 100 murals in the Library of Congress. The Chicago Tribune in 1993 marveled at the work that Perry and his team were doing, carefully removing decades worth of dirt to reveal vibrant murals, some as large as 30 feet across, depicting themes such as Justice and Peace. "We're working on something that's irreplaceable -- like a life," Perry told the newspaper at the time.

Perry also painstakingly documented the work, leaving the library a collection of photos showing the murals before, during and after renovation from 1985 to 1994. It's listed in the library records as the "Perry Huston Collection." From 1980-82, he served as president of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works. And through it all, he devoted special time to training, taking on a lot of interns and volunteering in his field.

"He was very charismatic and very giving -- he was a real leader in his field," Holly says. "He had a big set of admirers." In 1981, Perry married Jean Turman and remained devoted to her until her death in 2012, spending every day with her when she needed to go into a nursing home at the end of her life.

Around the same time, he began his own battle with dementia and a couple years ago, he moved into the Silverado facility in Fort Worth. The fun-loving side of Perry still glimmers through. Every night in Fort Worth, he would play the piano for the staff and residents. He had three songs he remembered; then one day he remembered a fourth. Now that he's living in the Silverado in Alexandria, Va., Holly's hopeful that there will soon be a piano he can play again. Because Perry has always loved bringing joy to others.