



## Lester Matthew Fritz

September 24, 1923 - March 13, 2012

Lester Matthew Fritz, "Fritz", the only child of Gertrude Isabella (Diercouff) and Ben Paul Fritz, was welcomed into this world at 6 o'clock Monday morning, September 24, 1923, in a small house at 322 S. Mission Street in Wenatchee. He left it on Tuesday, March 13, 2012, up his beloved canyon, surrounded by family in the last home he and Lila built. What happened in between has made all the difference.

He was the third generation of the Fritz family in the valley, but the first to be born here. "Fritz's" great-uncle on his mother's side, Charley Chafey, had come to the valley in the 1890's, and in 1903, purchased land to farm up No. 1 Canyon that's still in the family today. Les grew up in small-town Wenatchee, where everyone still knew each other and the family do's, neighborhood get-togethers, and other community activities were the norm and not the exception. The Great Depression hit when he was six years old, and though times were hard, people banded together and made do to survive. Many lifelong relationships were formed with friends and neighbors through these and other shared experiences. During this time, the Fritz family moved to their orchard at Fifth and Jennings Street. Lester worked long hours in the orchard, yet still found time for school and mischief with his friends. This continued through his graduation from Wenatchee High School in 1942, and then the War broke out. Most of his friends joined up right away, but he was needed on the ranch. His mother relented in 1944, and he enlisted in the Army Air Corps.

At 6'3", 190 pounds and almost 21, "Fritz" was hoping to become a pilot. The air war was going well by this time, and not-so-many air crews were needed. He said he spent the remainder of the War waiting for more training, while "defending isolated bits of California, Texas and Arizona." Lester joked that his Army career basically consisted of "many train rides and a lot of PT (calisthenics), but the food was pretty good." He was honorably discharged in 1945, and returned to the Valley. He was proud of being a Veteran, belonged to the American Legion for years, and marched in quite a few Veteran's Day parades. However, he was modest about his service as he recognized and respected other's far greater sacrifice.

In 1946, he began his 37 year career at Wenatchee's Sears and Roebuck store. Lester counted many of his co-workers as cherished friends, and met his future wife there. Dad was fiercely loyal to Sears, so everything in the house and yard was either Sears, Kenmore, or Craftsman. We grew up as if JC Penney's and Montgomery Ward simply did not exist. He started in the tire shop and when he retired in 1983, it was as the store's Manager of Home Furnishings. In the summer of 1949, he married the love of his life, Lila Mae Archer Barnes. In that moment, Lester, the only child, acquired ten sisters-and brothers-in-law! Dad delighted in being part of a large family. Lester and Lila had two children, were true partners in life, and they had been married for 62 years when she passed in 2010. Their near-perfect relationship raised the bar pretty high for my sister and I to achieve with just normal people. We were teased about living with "Ozzie & Harriet", but our perception was more "Lucy & Ricky." Our large family enjoyed their get-togethers and had several each year. They were always rather raucous affairs filled with great food, stories, laughter, and many of them involved camping. Sometimes in the woods, sometimes in a relative's, or our, backyard. Fishing was always on the agenda, and Dad had honed his skills and lore since childhood. From the smallest trickle of a creek to the ocean, Lester knew how to fish it and what to use. He enjoyed passing the knowledge on to his kids and grandchildren, and

was very patient with our "learning curve." "Fritz" was an avid hiker and camper, which led to his involvement with the Boy Scouts. First as a father of a scout, then as a adult leader in both Troop 13 and Troop 49 in the late 50's and 60's. He participated in hikes, camp-outs, and jamborees all over the northwest. He was a proud member of the "Order of the Arrow."

Combining relatives in Chelan with an obsession with boats, naturally led Lester to a lifetime of boating and camping trips up Lake Chelan. He loved the upper end of that lake, the Landing, and Weaver Point especially. He could sit at Weaver Point and spend hours just looking down lake and appreciating the natural beauty of the place. He had a special respect and admiration (and instilled it in us) for the pioneers of the Stehekin area and their families, many of whom he knew personally. He was active with the Wenatchee Outboard Association, serving as it's First Commodore in 1952. Lester participated in a few of the "Lake Chelan Marathon" races, and many other "outboard" races locally. When KUEN Radio needed an announcer/commentator for the AM station's broadcast of the "Apple Cup" Unlimited Hydroplane Races on Lake Chelan, "Fritz" fit the job perfectly and did several races (we have the tapes!). There was always a boat beside, or in, our garage. A couple of old outboard motors and pieces thereof still are. In addition to boats, Dad was just "Plane" nuts. A Charter member of the "Museum Of Flight", his love of aviation went way back. Though never a pilot, he reveled in aircraft, collecting odd parts and pieces of planes, motors, etc. Lester was in jaw-dropping awe of pilots, crew and the people who maintained and restored airplanes. The easy camaraderie and warm humor of hangar dwellers often "restored" him, and he would want a special tip o' the hat and a "pass the cinnamon rolls..." to them - you know who you are. He loved helicopters and never passed on a chance to ride. Over the years, he must have flown up and down Lake Chelan 80 times (with side trips to Domke) in Chelan Air's Cessna and Beaver floatplanes. He was a sucker for the DeHavilland with its big rotary roar. He had many memorable

flights: one, a flight in Stan Bryant's open cockpit WWII Biplane (with aerobatics) in his 70's, and last summer's ride in a vintage warbird B-25 Bomber "Maid in the Shade" at the tender age of 87. He sure had "pudding face" after that one!

"Fritz" was never one to sit around, and after he retired and Lila sold the coffee shop, they traveled. Many, many trips to the Reno Air Races (where he met and had his picture taken with many of his wartime air heroes), and the National Finals Rodeo (ride those bulls!). There were annual gambling junkets, visiting relatives in the western states, and friends in Westport for great seafood. That man could eat some crab! The local crab-feed people probably felt he should buy two tickets to compensate. The time between trips was spent doting on his grandchildren. He was definitely a "hands-on grampa" and always had time (and energy) for them. In 2004, one of the regular float judges for the Apple Blossom Grand Parade was unavailable and Dad was asked to fill in. He participated with gusto and enjoyed the floats and the people who drove and rode them so much, he continued with the judges through 2011. He always looked forward to helping, and adding to his T-shirt collection. He'll miss those pancake breakfasts, talking "shop" with the firemen at the annual event. Speaking of firemen... All these accomplishments and affections (except Lila and the family) pale in comparison to the love and respect he had for his second family, the Firefighters and Staff of Chelan County Fire District 1. As a Fire Commissioner for over 40 years, his admiration of these selfless heroes and what they do, indeed all fire departments was ABSOLUTE. He was so proud of his "guys and gals," and honored to be in the company of such exceptional people. His favorite attire was some piece of his commissioner gear, especially the hat. Humbled that the people of his district would re-elect him seven times, "Fritz" was ever mindful and appreciative of the trust his constituents placed in him and worked diligently to meet their needs. He was very happy to have played a part in the district's history of superior fire protection for the residents of District 1, and

Chelan-Douglas counties as a whole.

I know that I've left a great many significant people, events, and achievements out of this summary of an amazing life, but please forgive me, and let me close by saying that my father was simply the finest human being I've ever known. I hope you had a chance to meet him.

Preceded in death by his parents; and all ten of his in-laws; he is survived by his son, Ben (Denise) Fritz and daughter, Sherry (Bill Smith) Warren of Wenatchee; grandchildren, Erik (Cara) Warren of Yakima and Amy Warren of Wenatchee; great-grandchild, Stephanie of Yakima; numerous nieces, nephews, a couple boatloads of cousins, and a beloved (but now undoubtedly treat-deprived) neighborhood dog named "Rambo." All of us will greatly miss him, are deeply saddened by his passing, and shocked by the size of the hole he leaves behind. At the same time, we are sincerely grateful to have been so blessed by his presence in our lives.

A Memorial Service will be held at Jones & Jones~Betts Funeral Home on Tuesday, April 10, 2012, at 1:00 p.m. The family would like to especially thank Dr. Stephen Voorhees, the amazing inspirational nurses (well, everyone involved) at Central Washington Hospital Home Care and Hospice, Father Argemiro Orozco, PT Alexander, and ResCare Homecare. Please express your thoughts and memories on the online guestbook at [jonesjonesbetts.com](http://jonesjonesbetts.com). Arrangements by Jones & Jones~Betts Funeral Home, Wenatchee.

# Tribute Wall

DM

“ Having worked for 3b2 years for Chelan County Fire District 1 it was an honor having Lester as my Fire lwas a privliege and a honor to work for him. Lester's always had little sayings at a meeting ,or when talking to him . Sometime they were quite entertaining. He will be missed. Retired Chief Dave and Becky Mathews.

dave mathews - April 09, 2012 at 10:54 PM

ST

“ spinning brodies in the snow as a pasenger in Uncle Fritz's Willys.

Sam Thaccker - April 06, 2012 at 09:45 PM

CT

“ Uncle Fritz..I was blessed to have this man in my life.He has always ment so much to me.Thanks for the memories, Love Christie

Christie A. Thacker - April 06, 2012 at 07:08 PM

JD

“ I am sorry for your loss. I remember "Fritz" from Sears. My grandmother, Mary Alice Seaman, and my Uncle Harley Hildebrand worked there. He was such a kind man, and could fix just about anything. All of my memories of him are fond.  
Jill Penhallegon Dutter

Jill Penhallegon Dutter - April 06, 2012 at 11:18 AM

LH

“ I had the honor and privlidge to work with this amazing man at Sears. Being new to retail and retail management, he would take me under his wing. I learned a lot about Customer Service by his example. He was always willing to listen and share what he had learned in Retail to any of us Rookies. He could always make me laugh. One of my Favorite "Fritz" stories was one day he was talking about an extremely difficult customer. The challenge over the years and how it was so difficult sometime to deal with customers who were mad, upset or simply unreasonable. He said to me "Someday when I retire, I will take out the book I have of all those difficult customers. I am going to call them one by one and say "Go to Hell" and then hang up". I am confident he acutally did not do that....but it was a great laugh for all of us sitting there.

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**Linda "Rose" Haglund** - April 05, 2012 at 01:26 PM

NW

Fritz had the ability to make working a "fun experience" with a gift for using the English language to great effect. He will be missed by everyone, customers and employees of Sears!  
Nancy Weld

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**Nancy Weld** - April 06, 2012 at 10:52 AM