



Richard R. Rescia

February 12, 1930 - April 11, 2022

Richard R. Rescia, 92, died on Monday, April 11, 2022, surrounded by his children and care giver at his home.

Richard was born in Springfield, MA on February 12, 1930, to Giacomo and Ida Rescia, and spent his childhood growing up in North Agawam, an enclave of Italian immigrants. His father died when Dad was 10 years old, leaving him with his mother and his older brother Reno. After high school he left for the University of Mass. where he graduated cum laude. He then did his graduate work in mathematics at the University of Conn.

In 1953, Dad married Helen C. Smith and they moved to Northampton where he had a job opportunity to work at the Foster Farrar Company, a hardware store owned by a family friend, then located on Main St. They started a family and settled at their home on Franklin St. Mom and Dad lived there for nearly 70 years.

At a young age Dad began playing the piano, giving concerts of operatic arias for his mothers' friends. Music became his passion that eventually led him to create an opera company in Northampton, playing the organ at South Congregational Church in S. Amherst and finally the organist at St. John's Church for over 20 years.

In 1967, Dad began what would become an annual tradition at St. John's producing Menotti's Amahl and the Night Visitors in early December, and presenting Handel's Messiah every Christmas with full orchestra, soloists and the congregation singing the choruses.

The opera company Dad began in the 1980's was called Project Opera, later renamed Commonwealth Opera. Dad conducted more than 100 performances of operas including La Gioconda, Fidelio, Norma, Turandot, Aida, and many musicals, including My Fair Lady, Kismet and Oliver. All of these productions involved creating strong community relationships with various performing arts organizations in our area. Dad especially loved working with children's choruses, frequently choosing operas or musicals to involve the young to give them the experience of being on stage and singing with a full orchestra. Dad's musical collaborations have been many including Pioneer Valley Symphony, Amherst and Pioneer Valley Ballet, South Hadley Community Chorus. He also was able to bring internationally distinguished artists to Northampton including Eleanor Steber, Jean Kraft and Erie Mills. Dad's community involvement did not stop at creating music. He was a longtime member of the Northampton Lion's Club working tirelessly for them at the Annual Ski and Skate Sale, the annual Game Dinner, and the popular Antique Car Show. He also took on the roles of president, treasurer, and secretary. In 1994, Dad had the Lions Club and Commonwealth Opera join together to help refurbish the Northampton High School theater and Congdon Hall. A concert was given to help fundraise and many community members were involved.

Dad began a real estate business in Northampton with his best friend and partner, Stanley Zewski. He was also a member of the Western Mass Credit Bureau and an active member of the Northampton Downtown Business Association.

All of these activities still do not create an accurate portrait of who Dad was. Growing up our parents' main focus was all about family. Dad was home every day for lunch and dinner and although we didn't go on too many vacations, the one's we did go on were epic, including a 5-week camping trip circling the country. We had never camped before and it was a fun experience driving a Rambler Rebel to New Orleans, California, Wyoming, North Dakota and then home. Within a few days Mom learned how to cook on a camp stove and we

could put up the tent fairly quickly. For some reason, everyone got along, even sleeping 5 to the tent. We also spent 4 weeks in Italy, camping and staying with our Italian relatives. In Florence we learned that you could eat octopus and there was nothing better than real Italian minestrone soup for lunch. Dad was always even keeled and never had a harsh word toward us children even though we may (may?) have earned one. He and Mom loved us unconditionally. Our conversations were always civil and interesting, especially around the dinner table when we were a bit older, kids being Democrats and Dad a lifelong Republican (until 2016). At one point Dad started to tell us he was always right, making a joke. The kids finally made a plaque for his desk at work, Richard Right Rescia. We laughed about that thing for years.

Over time our parents extended the family to include many others, including foster brothers, some of whom lived with us for years. After Kim, the eldest, moved out of the house, other teens who needed a safe haven from homelessness or difficult family situations were invited to move in. Strangers still come up to him and ask how our parents are. Strangers to him, but they had lived in the house and had been cared for by our parents, and still have fond memories of time there.

Dad taught his children, Kim, Kari and Karel, that in life you always leave something better than how you find it. We try to emulate that in whatever we do.

Dad was predeceased by his parents, wife Helen in 2019, their young baby Keith, grandson Matthew Rescia, brothers Reno and Renzo and his sister Yola.

He leaves behind his loving children Kim Rescia and wife Nancy Donato, Kari S. Knapp and husband Karl Knapp and Karel Rescia. Also, his grandchildren Leah Rescia, Greg Rescia, Aaron Knapp and wife Myka Plunkett and Katherine Johnson and husband Jalil. Great grandchildren Turner, Nora, and Ellis with another on the way.

The Rescia family would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to Mom and Dad's loving caretaker of 8 years, Anna Asiedu, and his good friend and support Morris Rosenthal. Also, to Dr. Henry Simkin for 40 years of excellent care and compassion.

At Dad's request there will be no services or memorials. There will be a private family burial at the Springfield Cemetery. DROZDAL FUNERAL HOME of Northampton has been entrusted with his services. For more information, or to leave the family a personal condolence, please visit Drozdalfuneralhome.com

Tribute Wall

DL

“ I had the privilege of working with Richard at Commonwealth Opera and will always remember his kind heart, warm sense of humor, and artistic vision. He was that rare combination of both vision and action. Always on the move from one project to the next whether it was something for the opera (meetings, rehearsals, more meetings, fundraisers...), Foster Farrar's, volunteer work for another organization, or mowing a friend's lawn - he did it all. He would help anyone, always had a kind word, rarely spoke negatively of anyone. He laughed heartily and appreciated and valued those in his sphere - most especially his family. My condolences to you all. May you find solace in your memories of him and his well-lived life.

Dora Lewis - May 22, 2022 at 03:05 PM

 Deb
Edwards

“ Richard and Helen were good friends of my father, Bill Edwards; I think they met through Project Opera. I even helped out on a production of Amahl and the Night Visitors one year and on the Magic Flute at the Academy. Richard was always very kind. My condolences to the family.

Deb Edwards - May 21, 2022 at 06:01 PM

JB

I have very fond memories of Richard from working with Commonwealth Opera on publicity while my mother, Mary Ann Urban, was on the Board, along with Jim Palermo and Ron Luchsinger, Artistic Director. I also remember some great fundraising parties in his beautiful and inviting home - progressive dinners, from my days of living in Amherst.

Richard was one of the most interesting and vibrant men I have known. He made an unforgettable and lasting contribution to the arts community in the

Pioneer Valley. My condolences to his family and friends, especially Kari.

Joleen Benedict

Joleen Benedict - May 21, 2022 at 10:07 PM

SF

“*I have fond memories of playing my violin for concerts which were conducted by your dad at the Academy of Music, St. John's and St. Mary's churches, etc. Your dad has made our world a better place in many ways, including by his musical talent. It has been a wonderful experience for me to be in the audience when he conducted the orchestra and cast at UMass. My heartfelt sympathy goes out to his family at this difficult time. Stacia Filipiak Falkowski*

Stacia Filipiak Falkowski - May 21, 2022 at 03:36 PM

JS

“*Just read the obit in the Daily Hampshire Gazette. I worked at Commonwealth Opera for a brief period and produced The King & I. I was a very "out" lesbian and never would have guessed he was a Republican. He was always very kind to me despite others who would have preferred I be straight. When I saw him in recent years at an event where he was honored at Smith, we spoke briefly as though no time had lapsed. A lovely man who contributed to the community in a myriad of ways. A life well lived for sure! --JM Sorrell*

JM Sorrell - May 21, 2022 at 03:30 PM

LH

“ *Richard was one of a kind and we were saddened to learn of his passing. He always treated Pete and I with warmth and kindness and we remember all the Thanksgiving dinners! He will be missed by many. Please accept our deepest empathy and know that you are all in our thoughts.*

Linda and Pete Heon

linda heon - May 21, 2022 at 01:48 PM

TA

“ *Thinking of you Kim, Kari, and Karel. Sending peace and comfort. I have always admired and appreciated Richard as a kind and caring human and as a community contributor. Richard's community focused small businesses and his contributions to the arts in Northampton were extraordinary and deserving of accolades even though he prefers not to be in the spotlight. His legacy will live on in Foster Farrar and in our memories.*

*Warmly,
Teri Anderson*

Teri Anderson - May 21, 2022 at 10:33 AM

KS

“ I have fond memories of Richard and Project Opera. I auditioned for the chorus and he offered me the role of the page in “Amahl and the Night Visitors.” What he didn’t tell me was that I would have to wrestle onstage with two sopranos that out-weighed me. We had lots of laughs during rehearsals. And later, when Richard heard that I had designed a few sets for local theater companies (including VLO) he asked me to design the set for “La Traviata” which turned out to be one of the most grand and elegant in my ultimate 78 show career. He loved opera—and he brought delight to so many opera lovers in the Valley. He’s the perfect example of how love and passion can turn into action that brings delight to so many.

Ken Samonds - May 21, 2022 at 10:16 AM