

OLAF THEODORE HARKEN

Born May 6, 1939. Died October 21, 2019

Birthplace: Medan, Sumatra, Indonesia. Olaf died where he lived most of his adult life, in Pewaukee Wisconsin.

He is survived by his Wife of 47 years Ruth, 3 daughters, 4 granddaughters and 1 grandson.

Preliminary plans include a visitation and service Saturday morning, October 26 at Galilee Lutheran Church in Pewaukee, followed immediately by a celebration at Harken corporate headquarters. For overseas friends, another celebration of Olaf's life will be held during the annual METS show in Amsterdam in November.

Olaf Harken and his older brother, Peter, created the hugely successful rope handling business that bears their name, by working hard, delivering excellence, and having fun every day.

Harken, Inc. makes marine hardware, hydraulics and winch systems for racing and cruising sailboats of all types and sizes. Industrial hardware applications include the commercial marine, architectural, and rope access and rescue industries.

The brothers took a lot of chances over the years – and employees are encouraged to do the same.

When Olaf Harken was inducted into the National Sailing Hall of Fame in 2014 along with Peter, he explained the brothers' business philosophy: "When trying new stuff our rule is to ask, 'if it all goes bad, can we survive?' Then we go to the bar and forget what we just said and do it anyway!"

Olaf and Peter quickly learned that the real fuel behind a company's success is its people.

"Peter and I were not very smart," Olaf said in his 2015 memoir *Fun Times in Boats, Blocks & Business*, "but we did know that success is linked directly to trust and treating people with dignity, and maybe a little sprinkling of humor."

The Harken story has been full of twists, turns, successes, and reinventions, but through it all the goal of challenging the status quo and commitment to being at the front remains.

Today at Harken, Peter Harken told an assembly of Harken members:

"My Brother did all the hard work so I could have all the fun."

During the days when the company was just getting going, Olaf was in charge of the money. He kept us in business. If I had been in charge of that we would have been in big trouble. "

"His legacy is in this culture. So, let's just keep doing what we do. Just keep getting better. You are a great family. Thanks a lot. He'll be watching you, so no sloughing off!"

Today at Harken, Bill Goggins, CEO Harken read this passage from Olaf's autobiography in remembrance:

"Peter and I have long believed there is a word that should apply to almost every action and decision. That word is honesty. I got my first lesson in honesty shortly after we started the business—back when we were building those first six boats for Ohio State University. Like almost every boatbuilder, we were behind by quite a few weeks. When our customers called and wanted to know when we were going to deliver, I lied. I said they would be ready in about a week. Peter overheard me and was furious. He made me call them back and tell them I was wrong, that we were further behind and would not be able to deliver for a few more weeks. This was very embarrassing, but it taught me a good lesson. For one thing, I didn't have to keep on lying each week. Taking the beating once is a lot easier than building one lie on top of another. It's not easy to do and the customer is going to be angry or disappointed, but that's the end of it."

Goggins also said:

"You couldn't have scripted a nicer weekend for Olaf than the one just past. Pewaukee Yacht Club honored Olaf on Saturday night with a Lifetime Achievement Award to a full house standing ovation. He rose, walked to the front and accepted the award with his usual grace and dignity. The evening was highlighted by Olaf and Ruth on the dance floor. Sunday was a simple Packer game with his family and then, a remarkable chance 30-minute walk with his brother in the sunshine. He died peacefully in his sleep with his loved ones nearby. The company mourns his loss; however the company celebrates his life by doing what we do...every day...into a bright future."

Olaf Harken was born of Dutch and Swedish parents in Indonesia at the beginning of World War II. In 1941 the Japanese attacked Indonesia. During the fighting and nightly bombings, Peter, Olaf, and their Swedish mother managed to escape to Borneo. Their Dutch father, Joe joined the very small Dutch army and helped fight the Japanese until his capture. Joe was imprisoned for five years and was not liberated until the end of the war. Meanwhile, Peter, Olaf, and mother Ulla lived first in Borneo, were then troop-shipped to New Zealand for a year, to Australia for another year, and finally shipped to San Francisco in 1944. Here they were miraculously reunited with their father in 1946 after the war was over.

After studying at Georgia Tech, Olaf Harken took an engineering job in New York City, but in 1967 he returned to Wisconsin to help Peter build boats for the college market. "Why I made that decision then I'll never know," said Olaf.

Inside the office were a couple of doors on saw horses used as desktops, an old typewriter, a telephone, and a file cabinet. A plastic sheet separated the offices from the fiberglass and assembly area. Marketing consisted of all-night drives with Peter at the wheel and Olaf typing brochures in the back seat of an old Chevy wagon. That first year they made \$3,800-together.

The Harkens aren't sure exactly when the turnabout happened, but Olaf the engineer ended up running the business side of Harken Inc., with Peter the economist handling design and production. "Peter designed the blocks, and knew more about manufacturing than me," Olaf said. "Olaf was more patient,

better at the business than me,” Peter said. “Each of us was better at the other guys’ education. We kept it quiet, figuring people wouldn’t want blocks designed by an economist.”