

Lawrence Chapel Oaks Cremation and Funeral Service

Jerry Dean Mercer

(January 30, 1939 - June 23, 2017)

Jerry Dean Mercer, 78, Lawrence, Kansas passed away Friday, June 23, 2017 following a long illness. A Celebration of Life is scheduled at 11:00 am on Saturday, July 8, 2017 at University Community of Christ, 1900 University Drive in Lawrence, Kansas.

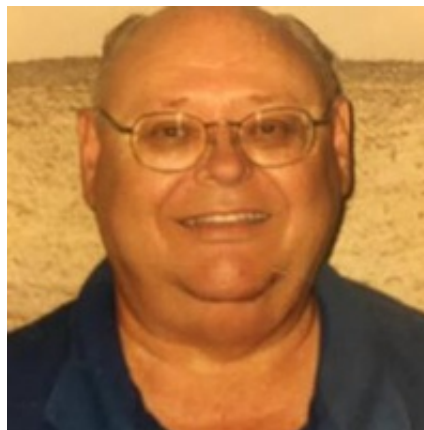
Jerry was born on January 30, 1939 in Salem, Illinois to Berthold "Bert" and Elma Parker Mercer. He grew up on the family farm and attended public schools.

During his senior year at Salem High School, he gained national attention on the baseball diamond as he pitched no-hitters in 5 of the first 6 games of the season. His athletic exploits were featured in the May 21, 1956 issue of Life Magazine. The hard throwing right-handed pitcher drew many Professional Baseball scouts and curious fans wherever he pitched. After graduating from high school, he signed with the Kansas City Athletics and played with various teams in their minor-league system over the next 5 years. Amazingly, all of Jerry's teams won their respective minor league championships and Jerry was the winning pitcher at every championship game.

In 1957, he started the season by going 3-0 with the Mattoon Athletics of the Midwest League before being promoted to the Grand Island Athletics of the Nebraska State League, where he was 3-3 and the winning pitcher in the season-ending game to determine the League Champion. A personal highlight that year was earning a victory on June 1, then catching a bus home to Salem to marry his high school sweetheart, Avanelle Harmon, on June 2, 1957 at the Mt. Moriah Christian Church.

In 1958, he was a member of the Selma Cloverleafs of the Alabama-Florida League where he was 8-8 on the year. Highlights included the birth of his first son and another league championship. He was then invited to play for the Tampa Athletics in the Winter Instructional League where he went 2-3 and won the final game of the League Championship.

In 1959, he started the season with the Albany Athletics of the Eastern League but was later reassigned to the Sioux City Soos of the Three I League where he finished with an 8-5 record and helped win a league championship. At one point, with the pitching staff decimated by injuries, he stepped up to start 3 games and pitch two other games in relief over a 7-day span. He was 3-1 for the week, however the strain of pitching so much over a short amount of time injured Jerry's back and tore his rotator



cuff.

In 1960, he returned to Sioux City, where he recorded a 9-6 record while pitching through his injuries. Again, the team finished as league champions.

In 1961, he pitched for the Portsmouth Tides of the South Atlantic League where he was 1-1 before being reassigned to the Lewiston Broncos of the Northwest League where he recorded a 9-6 record. In the final game of his career, he pitched a 12-inning complete game shutout by a score of 1-0, clinching the Championship. He allowed just 2 singles in the game.

Eventually, Jerry's back injury cut short his professional baseball career so he enrolled at Washburn University in Topeka, Kansas, earning a bachelor's degree in Education while also serving as an assistant coach of the WU baseball team.

Upon graduation, Jerry led the State Industrial School for Boys in Atchison, Kansas, a pilot program for troubled teenage boys. Over the next 25 years, he and Avanelle would serve as cottage parents. Along with their 5 children, Jerry and Avanelle lived amongst a constantly changing group of teenage boys in a dormitory setting on the campus of what was previously known as the Kansas Children's Receiving Home. The boys living in the cottage attended Atchison High School and the Northeast Kansas Vocational Technological Center. It is estimated that approximately 1,500 young men were under their care over the years. Jerry was promoted to youth services coordinator near the end of his career and honored in 1982 as the Kansas State Employee of the Year for his outstanding performance and service.

Jerry had many hobbies and interests including fishing, gardening, painting, and woodworking. He loved watching Royals baseball and KU basketball games and was an enthusiastic card player. He was inducted into the Salem Community High School Hall of Fame in 1993. He was a member of University Community of Christ in Lawrence.

Survivors include his wife, Avanelle Harmon Mercer, of the couple's home in Lawrence, Kansas, three sons, Edward (Pam) Mercer, Spokane, Washington, Jeff (Susie) Mercer, Lawrence, Kansas, Ken (Stacy) Mercer, Celebration, Florida, and daughter Sara Beth Mercer, Oskaloosa, Kansas. Surviving siblings include sisters Cleta Stephens, Odin, Illinois and Janice Barker, Wichita, Kansas.

Jerry and Avanelle have 11 grandchildren, 6 great-grandchildren, and numerous nieces and nephews.

Jerry is preceded in death by his parents, sisters Jeannie Mercer and Mary Gomez, and a son, John Harmon Mercer.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Mercer Family Education Fund to benefit Jerry's grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Checks can be mailed to or dropped off at University Community of Christ, 1900 University Drive, Lawrence, KS 66044.

The Mercer family wishes to acknowledge and thank Dr. Eric Huerter, as well as the staff at Brandon Woods Rehabilitation Center and Visiting Nurses Association Hospice Care for their kindness and efforts over the past 12 months.