

Outdoorsman makes final journey by boat instead of a hearse

By Brandie Kessler Daily Record/Sunday News

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Ronald Bloss Sr. loved the water. As soon as the weather warmed enough, Bloss would tow his johnboat out to the Susquehanna River in Dauphin County and get the motor running.

"Come April, my dad would leave to go to the river," said Bloss' only daughter, Tina Rohrbaugh.

When the weather got nice enough, Bloss would bring his pontoon boat out, and ride around on that, Rohrbaugh said. He'd fish, listen to the radio and spend time with his friends on Shelly Island, across from Three Mile Island, where he had a cabin.

Bloss would spend all day on the water, his great-granddaughter Kelsi Rohrbaugh said. She smiled as she remembered how Bloss would take her tubing on the river. When Bloss wasn't fishing, he was usually hunting. He spent the fall in his cabin in the mountains.

But Bloss started to feel ill in December when he was bear hunting up in the mountains, his son-in-law Dennis Rohrbaugh remembered.

When Bloss got home to Mount Wolf, he went to be checked out. He thought his sugar might be a little high. It turned out his sugar was very high.

When the doctors did tests, they found something else. Cancer. A tumor was growing on Bloss' pancreas. It spread to his liver. The doctors told Bloss the cancer was terminal. He would probably live two months.

Bloss died Saturday at age 78.

His daughter remembered something her dad told her he wanted a few years back. While he was eating in the Manchester Diner one day, a lady told Bloss about her husband's funeral, where he was carried to the ceremony by boat. Bloss thought that was a neat idea was neat.

So on Wednesday, the pallbearers at Diehl Funeral Home in Mount Wolf hoisted Bloss' casket aboard his johnboat.

Bloss took one final boat ride. The view on Maple Street toward Manchester Union Cemetery, wasn't the same as the view on the Susquehanna, albeit a little foggy. And Bloss didn't catch any fish on the way.

But it was a tribute from his family, to a man who loved to be on the water. "That's what dad really wanted," Rohrbaugh said. "It was like him going fishing, going for that last ride."

Tony Pirozzi has been a member of the Shiloh American Legion Honor Guard for four years. He's seen some unique final tributes. Wednesday marked the first time Pirozzi saw someone carried by boat.

Ronald Bloss Sr.'s family thought it would be appropriate given Bloss' love of the water and his service in the U.S. Navy.

Michael Gladfelter, owner of Diehl Funeral Home and Cremation Center Inc., said Wednesday marked a first for his funeral home, too. But he's done other unique services. His goal is to help families honor their loved ones.

For Bloss, who loved fishing and being on the water, "I thought this was perfect," Gladfelter said. His only regret: "If I would have been able to find a place virtually overnight that would have made a banner that said 'Gone fishing,' that would have been really neat."

