



## ***Stillwater Pioneer Athlete Memorial***

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### **GARY E. RIPPY**

November 21, 1941 - January 10, 1982  
Stillwater High School Class of 1959

3rd Annual Memorial Induction Ceremony  
October 10, 1998

Gary Rippy was born in Shawnee, Oklahoma, in 1941, the older child of Orville and Mary V. Rippy. His younger sister, Susan Rippy Matlock, was born in Stillwater. She resides here today and is a teacher, homemaker, and mother to two teenage sons, Scott and Ryan. Gary was married to Gayle, now deceased, and they had one daughter, Katherine,

who lives with her husband, Kerry Neis in Ft. Rucker, Alabama. Gary died of an apparent heart attack in Borger, Texas, in 1982. He was 40 years old.

Gary and his mother moved to Stillwater in 1944, when he was an infant. Mrs. Rippy wanted to be close to her brother, city merchant, Bud Earnest, as she awaited the return of her husband who was serving in WWII as a medical doctor in the Army Medical Corps. When the war ended, Dr. Rippy established his medical practice in Stillwater. Gary entered the first grade and would remain in Stillwater Public Schools until graduating from C.E. Donart High School in 1959.

Gary's distinctive quality was having a very clear understanding of what he wanted to do with his life, long before most youngsters began to mix skill and talent with work and a profession.

The early stages of Gary's sureness and certainty about his life's purpose were grounded in his talent for entertaining and crowd-pleasing. He learned to play and perform on the accordion. Soon the illusion of magic became a greater interest. He studied the "Art of Magic" and used his allowance to purchase several sophisticated magic tricks. By his sophomore year, "The Great Rippy" was performing for a fee. He flawlessly executed the "Floating Lady Trick" and mastered the art of making playing cards disappear into thin air. He loved to entertain, surprise and mystify. He practiced his magic not so much as a hobby - something of passing interest - but with studied determination, intensity, and perfection.

Gary matured early. He seemed to miss adolescence. His rich, baritone voice never squeaked and squawked like the other boys. His height, size, and rugged good looks - together with a well-behaved and mannerly personality - made Gary seem older and more mature than his fellow students. This physical presence, quick wit, and talent made him stand out among his peers. As his school friend, Dick Knox said, "Gary was the All-American Kid". It was Gary's voice, however, and his unremitting interest in broadcast radio that gave Gary a sureness and certainty about what he wanted to do with his life - a life he lived so fully, so early.

Gary and his family lived on Orchard Lane, just off University Drive and it was in an upstairs room, tucked away on the second floor of the Rippy home that Gary set up his make believe radio studio. He had a microphone and turntable on a small desk. There was a red light above the door to the room which Gary would activate when he was on the air! Practicing to be on the radio became a real-time fantasy for Gary. The same sureness and certainty of purpose in life blossomed when Gary wrangled a part-time job at Stillwater's KSPI. Gary would take out the trash and sweep up. He would collect the ticker tapes, which provided the make believe station with news, sports, and stock information, using them as he practiced all phases of radio announcing. The payoff was as sure and certain as a young person could have ever hoped for in starting a career. The day he turned 16 and received his driver's license, Gary went "on the air" at KSPI.

While the love of entertaining and communicating came naturally to Gary, he pursued other interests at Stillwater High. His major extracurricular activity was sports. He demonstrated an initial interest in wrestling,

but it was in football that Gary made his mark. His size and maturity made him a great nose guard and, at times - to an unsuspecting opponent - an effective fullback. Gary also served as President of the "S" Club and was a member of the HI-Y Club.

Nothing in young Gary's life, however, sustained and compelled his interest like radio broadcasting. After graduating from Stillwater High School, Gary continued to work at KSPI and attended Oklahoma State University. Gary knew, as did his close friends and parents, that his interest in radio broadcasting was so compelling that it squeezed out almost everything else in Gary's life. By the time he was 20 years of age, Gary had made his move full-time into radio broadcasting and journalism. He landed a position with a radio station in Enid. From there he went to KFH Radio in Wichita, then to Borger, in 1972, where he purchased and became the General Manager of the radio station KBBB. Gary later sold KBBB and returned to Oklahoma City as Director of Operations at KOCY. But, as Gary's family reports, Borger was favorite among the cities and towns in which he lived. He was pleasantly surprised when the Panhandle Bank and Trust asked him to return to Borger as its Vice-President of Marketing in 1980.

When he died in 1982, Gary Rippey, had spent 23 years doing what he loved to do and did so well. For many, this amount of time might represent a life's work and a time to retire. For others, it might represent a life of work, without contentment or sure reward. For Gary, at age 38, when he left broadcast radio, it was a life fulfilled. For the many who passed Gary's way - if knowing him only by his voice - there was this feeling about Gary's innate kindness and goodness as a person. Those qualities were no doubt early nurtured by his gracious, kind, and fun-loving parents, Orville and Mary V.

Susan says that her brother had "sort of a premonition" about leaving broadcast radio. The timing seemed right for Gary and his family, sweetened all the more by the offer to return to Borger. It was Borger's gain. While there Gary served on the City Council. He was a charter member of the Borger Ambassadors. He served on the boards of the Boy Scouts, Rotary Club, the Hutchinson County Historical Society, and the Hutchinson County Junior Live Stock Show. He was active in the Chamber of Commerce and the Presbyterian Church.

Gary was a devoted husband and father, a loving son, a great, big brother, and a friend to all.

Perhaps a phrase from the last sentence of President John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address best sums up the life of Gary Rippey. "With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own."

*Chris T. Delaporte  
Stillwater High School, Class of 1959*