

## Nelson, Darby Miles



80, of Champlin, MN. Born June 29, 1941 in Soudan, MN. Died peacefully at home of Alzheimer's Jan 13, 2022. Survived by his wife of 53 years, Geri; son Per (Margie) and daughter Robin Daiker (Jeff); grandchildren George and Ingrid Nelson and Halle, Ella and Parker Daiker. Predeceased by parents F. Miles and Margaret Gennes Nelson and sister Mitzi.

Darby's lifelong love of nature blossomed while he was growing up in the Minnesota River town of Morton, which for the rest of his life held a special place in his heart. He became a teacher of biology and environmental science at Anoka Ramsey Community College in 1966, a position he held for 35 years, and earned the first ecologist PhD from the University of MN in 1970. Receiving many academic accolades over the years, Darby was most appreciative of the Golden Chalk award presented by his students. His passion for teaching was inspirational, and many former students became cherished and lifelong friends.

Darby's passion for progressive activism - particularly on behalf of the environment - propelled him to shake off his inherent shyness and forge an enduring legacy. Early on, he advocated for wilderness designation for the Boundary Waters. In his three terms as a member of the MN House of Representatives (1983-88), he authored bills that became law in diverse environmental areas including asbestos removal, air quality, recycling and solid and hazardous waste management, pesticide regulation, prairie management and restoration, vehicle emissions inspections, creation of the MN Board of Water and Soil Resources, and establishment of a user-fee system to fund cross country ski trails. As a volunteer, Darby served as many nonprofit organizations as he could squeeze in, including Friends of the Boundary Waters, Conservation Minnesota, the Nature Conservancy, Freshwater Society, and the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council.

Inspired by his love for the transformative power of the written word, Darby wrote extensively. His works were published in a wide array of publications including Boundary Waters Journal, Minnesota Conservation Volunteer, Silent Sports, Biocycle, and The Naturalist. He made a formal transition from teaching to writing in 2001 and authored two award-winning books: *For Love of Lakes* (2012) and *For Love of a River-The Minnesota* (2019). The latter, undertaken after the onset of his cognitive decline, was as much the product of his raw grit as his intellect.

Darby fell in love with the outdoors at his mother's side long before he and three close friends paddled from Lake of the Woods to Hudson Bay in 1962. That was the first canoe trip for any of the boys, but it was certainly not the last for Darby. Meeting and marrying Geri, an outdoor adventurer in her own right, deepened his love for canoeing and camping. Their canoe and kayak expeditions together included treks in Minnesota, Alaska, Canada, Greenland and Norway.

Darby's other outdoor love was competitive cross-country skiing. In 1973, a trip to the inaugural US Vasaloppet XC ski race in Mora, MN hooked Darby for life. He often said that his claim to fame was competing in every Mora Vasaloppet, which he did for 49 years (1973 to 2021), and it was his lifelong goal to make 50. When people asked if he was skiing this year, he'd say, "The time I don't ski will be when I'm 6 feet under." Sadly, that has happened in this, the 50th year of his favorite event.

Equally at ease with a paddle, a pen or a piece of chalk, Darby's legacy lives on in his achievements and in the countless individuals he taught, coached, mentored, and inspired. His story is incomplete, though, without special mention of his relationship with Geri. Their bond sparked to life one summer evening in 1966 at the University of MN Itasca Biological Station and quickly grew into a truly remarkable partnership. From the vantage point of close observation, it is inconceivable that Darby's many works and accolades could have happened without Geri, his soulmate and paddling companion for life.

Visitation March 4, 6-8 PM and March 5, 10 AM preceding the service at 11 at Champlin United Methodist Church.