

Don Owen Christensen

FROM BIKER TO DAD



Family History StoryBooks



The Early Years

Don Owen Christensen was born in Ely, Whitepine, Nevada on March 26, 1940 as the youngest child in his family. His parents were Thorwald Noah Christensen and Lela (Owen) Christensen. Don had 6 older brothers and sisters. He was probably born at home, and didn't receive a birth certificate. Because of this, Don would tell his children that he was born in a cave- and they believed him!

Don lived through a very tumultuous time in the world. He was born just before the United States entered World War 2, and lived through the Korean War, Vietnam War, Cold War, Gulf War, and Afghanistan War. Don had registered with the Selective Service and took his military physical, but they told him he had flat feet and was pushed down the draft list. He was never called to duty. His father never served in the military, but his future father-in-law, Robert Vernon Bulkley, fought in the Pacific Theater in World War II.

Don's parents belonged to two different religions. His dad and grandfather, Jens, were Lutheran. Some of his family were Methodists. His mother, Lela, and her father, Charles, were members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Charles and his wife, Daisy, were a driving force in seeing that Don and his siblings were somewhat involved in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

When Don was eight or nine years old he was baptized in the Salt Lake Tabernacle- his memory conflicted with the recorded baptismal date. However, he remembered that his father was baptized as a Latter-day Saint on the same day.

Accidents

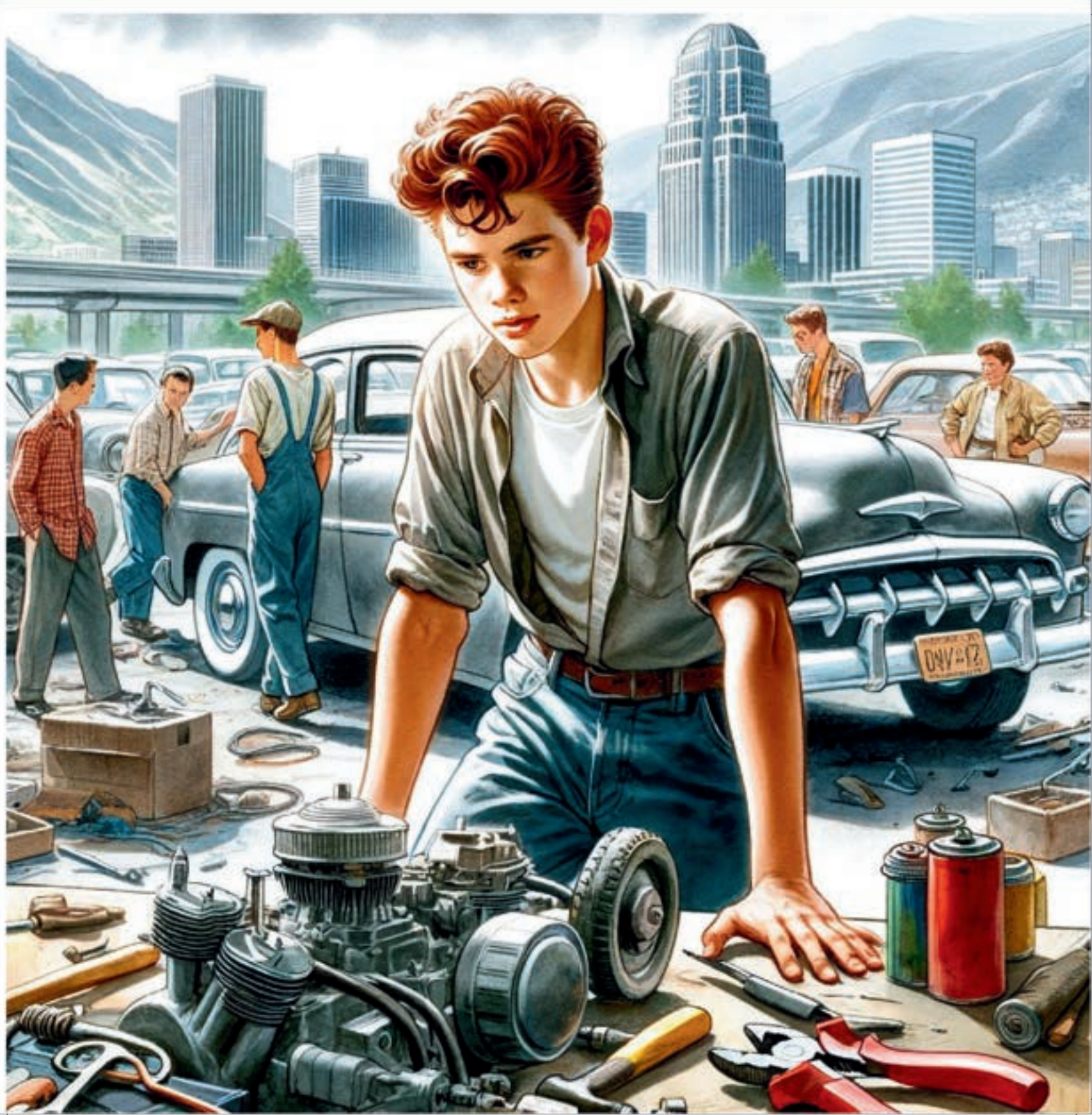
Don really valued his mother growing up. She was an original working woman. Many of her skills were with traditional household duties- cleaning, sewing, and raising 6 rough and tumbling boys. At the time she was a bit of a rebel because she knew how to drive and would drive herself around.

She worked at a sewing place and one day got distracted and stitched her fingers together with one of the big industrial sewing machines. She just unstitched her fingers and bandaged herself up.

Another day while she was driving, she and another person crossed the intersection at the same time and crashed into each other. The impact was so hard that it threw Don through the windshield. He remembered looking back at her through the hole he had just made in the windshield.

Don and his sister Donna didn't get along very well when they were young. One day during an argument she grabbed an axe and chased him around and eventually caught him and planted the axe in his head. His mother just bandaged him up and sent him to play.





Teenage Life

When Don was little his family moved from Nevada over to the Salt Lake Valley. He went to school through Junior High, but was better at mechanical things than at reading and spelling.

As a young teenager Don started working with his brothers at a junkyard in West Valley City. He managed to learn how to work on his own vehicle, a skill that would benefit him throughout his life. Don's kids remember watching him fix the family's many cars and even exchange motors in vehicles. The only thing he paid a mechanic shop for was to install new tires.

Don's brothers were practical and impractical jokers. If they committed a crime or got in trouble with the Law they would use his name! Law enforcement sometimes showed up at the family home to arrest someone with the name of Don Christensen only to find out it was one of the brothers who was the actual troublemaker they wanted.

Many of Don's brothers looked the same and it was hard to tell them apart- especially Don and his brother Ray when they were younger, and George later in life. They all had the same Danish nose.

If police officers ever showed up, his mother would call them all together in front of the police until, eventually, one of them would confess. When Don later married, some of those legal issues still had to be worked out.

The Biker

As a young adult Don loved motorcycles and the 'tough guy look' that it brought to mind. He was the typical 50's biker with a white T-shirt and cigarettes rolled up in the sleeve, riding an old Indian brand motorcycle. He would grease his hair with the greasy hair product of the time and comb his hair straight back. Usually Don was clean shaven, but did grow a mustache out occasionally. He grew to be six feet tall and weighed around 300 pounds, though his weight fluctuated.

Don had several tattoos. He had tattoos on his chest, forearms, and upper arms. His kids later thought it was cool, though he tried to instill in them a distaste for tattoos. Years later when he started volunteering in the Salt Lake Temple he was very embarrassed to have tattoos and encouraged his children not to get them.

When Don first met Sandra, who would become his wife, he was still a biker. He had a dog named "Lady" that would ride on his bike with him. Lady often growled at Sandra and wouldn't let her come up and touch Don without growling and snapping at her. Don loved dogs and had dogs most of his life, including when his kids were little.

Don married Sandra Lee Bulkley on October 26, 1962 in a civil marriage. He struggled with smoking and drinking and couldn't take her to the Temple until he overcame those habits. Although he worked hard at stopping several times, it always seemed to drag him back in.





The Family

By December of that year Don had managed to stop his habits enough that he was ordained a Priest in the Church. The next month he was ordained an Elder and received the Melchizedek priesthood, and then he and Sandra were sealed in the Manti Temple.

The reason they both chose this Temple was that no one in the family had been married in it to date. Later in life they would move to Huntington, Utah, which was just over the Mountain from the Manti Temple. Their kids would travel with youth groups to perform many ordinances within its walls.

Their first child was born later that year- Scott Bulkley Christensen. Scott carried his mother's maiden name, just like Don did. In 1965 their first daughter would be born. Patricia Owen was given her middle name connecting her to Don's grandfather Charles who had been so instrumental in getting Don to church as a boy.

In 1966, Roger Lee was born. He was given the same middle name as his mom. He had dark hair like hers. In 1968, Don Eugene was born. Don and Sandra didn't want to name him Don Jr., so they chose Eugene as his middle name. In 1970 Anna Maria was born. She was named after Sandra's Great Aunt Anna Lemon. In 1971, Shawna Rashell was born in Salt Lake City. Don's brother Jess had a daughter named Rashell, and Don liked the name. Paula Jo was born in 1974. Most of the kids were born bald or had light fuzz on their heads, but Roger, Shawna and Paula all had dark hair at birth.

Tooele and Grantsville

Don and Sandra moved in with family near Tooele, Utah, and Don got hired on with the Tooele Army Depot. He learned how to paint the various equipment and vehicles "army green." He received many awards while working for the Army, and was very good at improving processes within his division. Don received monetary bonuses for these process improvements, and became very good at finding better ways to accomplish the work he was assigned. His efforts were noticed at all levels at Tooele Army Depot and Hill Air Force Base.

This work lasted a few years, and then he and Sandra started managing a gas station in Grantsville- one of several they would manage over the years.

Grantsville had a problem with blow snakes and Sandra got very good at trapping and killing them. The Christensens kept a couple of horses in a barn behind the gas station- a Shetland Pony they named Lightning and a large horse named Strawberry. One time some of Don's children accidentally burned down a haystack, and he had to pay the owner back for the cost of the hay.

One night there was a tremendous lightning storm that knocked out the power. The next day when Don went outside he found the old tree out back had been hit by lightning and all the little birds that had roosted in the tree for safety that night had been killed by the lightning blast. He had to pick up all these little birds on the ground and toss them in the garbage.





Family Activities

The family first got a TV in Grantsville- a huge box that only showed black and white. It took time to warm up before an image would come on the screen and it would have a glowing dot for a few seconds when you turned it off. TV programs ended at about 10 or 11 o'clock at night and the screen just showed a test signal until morning.

Don and Sandra took their family to a lot of parades. They would park the old station wagon with the back end toward the route and allow the kids to sit on top of the car so they could see above the people sitting in front of them. They usually had a cooler full of Shasta Soda. Several of the kids got to walk in the parades at different times.

The Christensens went to Yellowstone a couple of times growing up. Don drove his truck, which meant the older kids had to ride in the bed of the pick up at times. When it was rainy on the drive they had to hold onto a tarp, which was extremely difficult in the wind.

One time they were stopped along the road in the park with Scott and Patricia in the back of the old pickup with the groceries. A hungry bear tried to climb up and investigate, but Don quickly shooed it away while the panicking kids scrambled trying to get out of the truck!

Don liked to listen to music on the radio. His favorite genre was Country Western. He loved Roger Whitaker, Marty Robbins, Roger Miller, Dolly Parton, Patsy Cline and many similar singers. One the whole family would sing was by Roger Miller called "King of the Road". The family enjoyed singing along to these songs while they travelled.

Family Games and Activities

The Christensens spent a lot of time with Sandra's family, and Don got along especially well with them. They played games like Pinochle and Risk and various card games whenever they were together.

Don also did a lot of hunting with his father-in-law Robert and Sandra's brothers. When his children were old enough, he brought them along too. They mainly stuck to deer hunting because tags were easier to get. Don's favorite area for hunting was the Manti/Lasal area.

The Christensens also did a lot of fishing. Don was very patient teaching his kids how to cast, reel, and clean fish. His favorite fishing hole was Potter's Pond, south of Miller's Flat Reservoir. One time their car bottomed out and lost the oil on the way home. Don hitchhiked to town while the family slept the night in the car. He was able to fix the car and get them all home.





Sandy

After several years in Grantsville, the family moved to Sandy. One time while Sandra was backing out of the driveway, Anna fell out of the car and it rolled over her midsection. They rushed to the hospital, but fortunately she wasn't hurt-probably because she hadn't tensed up when it happened.

Don had a house built in Sandy and had the kids help decide what color to paint it-they ended up having it painted hunter's orange! Unfortunately, something fell through and they never lived there. Around that time Don started managing another gas station, and the family got a dog named Angel that lived for about 20 years.

One of Sandra's sisters made Don a Santa Claus costume and he played Santa for friends and family. Because of his weight at close to 300 pounds, he didn't need to wear any extra padding under the suit. He would visit his family as Santa, and then run out and slip in the back door as himself again so he could fool the kids.

When Scott, Patricia, and Roger signed up for swim lessons, Don's idea was to just toss them in the deep end and either learn or have to be rescued. With all the fishing areas they went to, he felt they all needed to learn to swim. The kids enjoyed swimming at the various fishing holes.

Power Plants

The Christensens purchased and moved into a trailer in Price, Utah for a time while Don worked for the Painters Union. He worked at the power plant hundreds of feet above the ground, walking along narrow 4-inch beams. The painters wore harnesses, but there were still accidents. One time someone working above Don slipped and fell, and Don reached out his arm and caught the guy, saving his life. Occasionally Don worked in the coal mines as well.

On a trip to California to visit Sandra's sister Judy, the family station wagon broke down and they had to take a bus the rest of the way. The bus lost their luggage, so they arrived with nothing but the clothes on their backs. They made the most of it, enjoying some time at the beach and spending time with cousins.

They eventually moved their trailer down to Huntington, where Don and the kids would have to crawl underneath the house with a blowtorch to thaw the pipes that first winter. Don worked painting the nearby power plant. This gave the family some level of stability, and they lived in Huntington longer than anywhere else. Despite this work though, they still struggled for money.

Don took a second job as a security guard on the weekends at the plant. The kids enjoyed this, as they could come out and swim in the holding ponds. One day while driving back from the pond, one of the girls fell off of the tailgate of the truck and broke her collarbone.





Many Talents

Both Don and Sandra were heavily involved in the Boy Scout and Cub Scout programs, and both earned the Silver Beaver Award. Their boys worked hard in their scouting experience, and they had lots of adventures and impacted lots of lives.

Don made friends with a man named Wilford in Huntington who owned a junkyard and built stock cars. The families enjoyed getting together where Don put his mechanic skills to work helping Wilford fix and build his stock cars. He always numbered his cars #16. The family often went to the race track together had fun cheering him on.

Don even drove one of the cars in a race one time, though he usually just stayed in the pit area. He loved working on cars, and it helped him relieve stress- except when it was the family car!

Don had learned to paint and it was the staple of his career, but he also loved to work with wood. His dad, Thorwald, was a carpenter. Don loved to build, create, and repair wooden things. He built corrals, hog and rabbit pens, loading shoots and barns when they lived in Huntington. He would also build shelves in the kids' rooms and skirting for the trailer.

Fire!

The family's little world changed in 1979 when Huntington had its first murder and the family's bank was robbed. Luckily, within an hour the police caught the suspects. The robbery changed how they looked at the world- they all started locking their doors.

The family made a final trip to Yellowstone together before Scott left on his mission. They picked up fireworks along the way in Wyoming and spent some time in Jackson Hole. Because of their hunting experience, they loved seeing the giant arch made of antlers. It was a fun trip where they got to relive some of the memories from previous trips before their family changed.

One Sunday in 1983 while the family was at Church, some neighbors ran in and shouted that the Christensen's home was on fire. They determined later that the fire was caused by a hot iron that had fallen to the floor, possibly knocked over by one of the dogs.

Their neighbors and ward members were quick to help them find a place to stay and to do what they could to offer much-needed supplies like clothing and food, but the home was a total loss. Don was heartbroken, as everything he had worked so hard for in his life was lost. This caused even further strain on his relationship with Sandra.





Storm Clouds

Don got a new job the next year, so the family moved out near Vernal to a town called Naples. When that project was completed, he took a job with Flint Engineering and Construction, where he was able to work with his son Scott.

Unfortunately at the time there was a lot of strife in the family. Roger and Patricia owned a car together, and they got into a significant fight over an accident. Don and Sandra got involved and Roger made some comments that made Don so angry he lifted Roger off the floor and told him to leave. The family rarely saw Don's fury like this, and Roger decided to move in with a neighbor family.

During this time, Patricia also had an unexpected child, which added some stress to the family dynamic. Despite this, Don and Sandra agreed to care for Patricia and Paciance without hesitation. Paciance, with her red hair that matched Don's, would capture his heart. He nicknamed her Boo Boo.

After Scott moved out to Rangely Colorado to work in the oil fields, Don moved the family out there as well and purchased a new mobile home. Don and Scott started driving trucks for Dalbo Trucking, driving 10-ton pumper trucks around the oil field. During hunting season they kept their rifles in their trucks. They both got a deer on the same night!

The End of a Marriage

Don eventually started a company with a friend doing construction and painting. They hired some of Don's sons to do jobs like painting the local lumber yard and painting shingled roofs of homes in the area. When the business fizzled out, they all moved back to Salt Lake City.

At this point Don and Sandra's marriage was crumbling. His continued smoking bothered her so much that she would spray air freshener over him as he watched TV. Don moved down to the basement of the farmhouse at Smarts Dairy at first, but eventually they decided to get divorced.

They worked on paperwork for where the kids would live, and the news came out that Sandra had previously been unfaithful in her marriage. It was a sad time for Don, but ultimately offered him a new beginning.

Don and Little Don moved in with Scott while they worked at a sewer plant painting pipes. Scott made them take their clothes off before coming into the house because they smelled so bad. A few years later Don moved down to Phoenix, Arizona, where he worked painting trailers. Anna, Shawna, and Paula eventually moved down there as well.





New Beginnings

In Phoenix, Anna started dating a man named Stephen Brown. When they found out they both had an unwed parent, they decided to introduce them to each other. By the end of the year there was a double wedding in Las Vegas- Anna married Stephen, and Don married Stephen's mother, Marilyn Brown. Marilyn accepted Don just as he was, and he truly loved her.

Don continued as a painter, working on various apartment buildings and apartment interiors. He started going to the Methodist church with Marilyn. They loved to travel together to Las Vegas or Laughlin Nevada to gamble, or take a trip to California.

Don's father, Thorwald, passed away from cancer in 1989 after having lived with Jess and Betty for a time. After his passing, Jess and his wife Betty moved to Arizona where the brothers and their wives enjoyed time together

Breaking the Habit for Good

Don did eventually give up smoking. However it took a doctor telling him that they found a spot on his lung before he would finally quit for good.

Don had always worried about lung cancer, but instead he developed prostate cancer. He underwent several rounds of chemotherapy and radiation. At one point he was completely bald all over.

Marilyn got lung cancer and had a lung removed in an attempt to treat it, but ultimately passed away in 2001. It was very hard on Don, as he wondered if his smoking had contributed to her condition. Later he found out the air in the Arizona desert contained sand particles that get into people's lungs and can cause damage. Marilyn had been his true love.

Don eventually moved back up to Salt Lake City and lived with Scott and his wife Cindy. He started attending the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints again, and was even asked to work at the Salt Lake Temple. This got him thinking seriously about who he wanted to spend eternity with.



Together Again

Scott secretly started working on genealogy, and gathered all of Marilyn's information. In June of 2002, he surprised Don with the information and they set a date for when they could do her Temple Work and have Don and Marilyn sealed for all eternity.

Don had been relatively healthy until the prostate cancer, aside from a hernia repair. Later in life he used reading glasses and he got dentures in his 60's.

After Don had been sealed in the Temple to Marilyn, his prostate cancer returned and he decided not to fight it any longer. He moved back down to Phoenix where Stephen and Anna helped take care of him. He was tired, and wanted to go to heaven and be with Marilyn again in the next life.

He passed away on February 19, 2008, and was laid to rest next to Marilyn in the Phoenix Memorial Park Cemetery. He is remembered by his children and grandchildren.

Don Owen Christensen

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MARCH 26, 1940 - FEBRUARY 19, 2008

My Relationship:



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Don as a Baby - 1940



Don as a Boy - 1956



Don and His Son Scott



Don and Sandra's Wedding - 1962



Don as Santa Clause - 1974



Don and Little Don -
1984



Don and Patricia



Don and Marilyn

