

# Gymin' with Goose!

## Jeff "Goose" Gildea, 11/22/57 to 12/03/19

### Written by Scott O'Connor

I'm writing to share a story about my late friend, Jeff Gildea, who passed away December 3rd, 2019 after a 7 month battle with bile duct cancer.

I wrote to the IBBHOF about Jeff to see if they might acknowledge his passion for Indiana High School basketball. In connecting with Kayla Kessler of the IBBHOF, she suggested I write a story about my friend.

So here I am, not a professional author, but an avid Indiana basketball fan, grieving the loss of a good friend.

Jeff was an incredibly passionate fan of Indiana High School basketball. I nicknamed him Goose 48 years ago in 1972 when we were in high school at Arlington High School in Indianapolis. As it turns out, I met Jeff playing basketball. We used the basketball court in his driveway fittingly enough as he lived next to a friend of mine. He was a gangly kid, hence the name Goose.

Goose was a quiet guy who was passionate about everything from sports, history, the State of Indiana, and basketball - especially Indiana High School basketball and its rich history. Jeff's passion also extended to Indiana University basketball, as he graduated from IU. Jeff was also a subscriber to the IBHOF Indiana Basketball History Magazine. He became friends with Kyle Neddenriep, the high school sports reporter for the Indianapolis Star, after reading Kyle's stories on Indiana high school gyms 12 years ago. I consider myself to be a passionate high school basketball fan, but not to the level of Jeff.

I miss Jeff greatly now, especially during the Indiana High School basketball season. Jeff, our friend Moose, and I would go to games often during the season and during all rounds of the high school basketball tournament each year, checking out up and coming players as well as future IU recruits.

Had he lived to this year, Jeff would have been disappointed that he would not have been able to go to the tournament due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Jeff visited 1,239 high schools or former high school sites over the last 11 years and photographed 855 school gyms. I visited approximately 500 gyms, and about 400 of those were with him. During every trip I took with Jeff, we aimed for visiting sites in a certain part of the state, and inevitably, we ended up drifting into different, unplanned areas. There was always a school or a former school site somewhere nearby. I believe that

on our best day, we probably visited 40 different sites. It turned out that Jeff had been to some of the sites that I had not been to, but he wanted to go back again since he had not been able to get into them during his initial trip. When he asked me where I wanted to go, I would say "Anywhere you want to go!" because I had not been to most of them.

He was a stickler about trying to make the best use of time and daylight, so we always started early, sometimes as early as 7:00 AM, and often finished the day as late as 11:00 pm. He always teased me about wanting to take the time to stop to eat, as he wanted to make best use of time during the daylight. I would typically drive, as Jeff had a penchant for driving while trying to read Maps and eat at the same time. When Jeff would drive, he would put a beach towel on his lap while trying to hold a map and eat. I wasn't too fond of that therefore I decided that I would volunteer to drive and let him be the guide.

Jeff kept an envelope for each of the 92 counties in the state of Indiana. Each envelop included various maps, which I now have inherited. These were old school laminated maps of county roads that we used as our guide.

Jeff's inspiration for his gym hunting hobby was Kyle Neddenriep's original article in the Indianapolis star 12 years ago, about repurposed High School gyms as well as Kyle's book, *Historic High School Gyms: Discovering Bygone Basketball Landmarks*.

Jeff was visited every single school in Kyle's book. When we traveled the state together, our guide was Bob Adams' book, "Silenced Bells." I always teased Jeff that I would write a book about my time with him following this hobby, and that I would name it "Gymin' With Goose." Instead of writing a book, I'm sharing this story now of my travels of searching for Indiana gyms and schools with Goose.

For me, as a life-long resident of Indiana, the thrill of this hobby was in trying to find gyms, schools, or memorials in some very small towns I had never visited before. The thrill was the same for Jeff. It's amazing how in such a small town, you wouldn't see what you're looking for right away, but you would find it eventually. We often had to ask someone to point us in the right direction, possibly a senior citizen or another long-time resident. Many of them liked to share stories with us, full of information regarding their high school and its basketball history.



These were stories we would never hear anywhere else, and we always wished we had a tape recorder with us to capture some of these conversations. It was an education Jeff and I could never repeat.

Jeff was a very quiet guy, very calculated, and he had a good sense of humor. He was also a perfectionist in the sense that he wanted to make sure all information he obtained and recorded about his hobby was correct. And he'd let you know if it was incorrect! He and I shared unique knowledge of similar interests. It's really hard now not to be able to share that with Jeff now, especially when it comes to high school gyms, IU recruits, etc.

I always told him he needed to write a book about his adventures, but for him, that wasn't what it was about. His Dad had been a writer for the Bloomington Herald and covered the 1953 IU national championship team. Jeff felt that he could never live up to his dad's writing abilities. However, Jeff was a great writer in all the things he wrote to people. He always wanted to share with others books about music, sports, Indiana basketball, or pictures he'd taken of their school.

It has always amazed me that all these little towns in Indiana had gyms, how the gyms and teams were so revered, and how strong the small town rivalries were. The passion and history of every town, their people, and single class basketball, beating a rival or winning the sectional was everything to them.

Jeff's illness came so suddenly with him succumbing in early December 2019 after battling it for seven months. Jeff never wanted to slow down, and he always wanted to do as much as he could until the very end.

I really wanted to take him to the Muncie Fieldhouse rededication last fall, but that was never to happen. We would pencil in a lot of dates and he would just say "We'll see where I am at that point."

Our friend group at Arlington High School consisted of 17 guys and 12 of us still living in the greater Indianapolis area get together to play poker every few months. The last gathering we had before Goose passed was in November 2019. Jeff came, knowing he should not have. I believe he wanted to come one last time to see all of us and say goodbye.

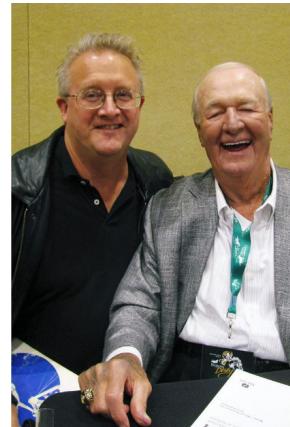
The week following poker night, Jeff was in the hospital and then went on home hospice until he passed away December 3rd, 2019. At 63 years old, after 47 years of friendship, it's hard to accept that my lifelong friend is no longer here with me. There are so many things that I see related to basketball, sports, music, and trivia that we always shared together.

There was never a more passionate Indiana high school basketball fan than Jeff "Goose" Gildea.

I will deeply miss the fun times I spent "Gymin' with Goose!" -Scott O'Connor



**Tom and Dick VanArsdale 1961 Indiana Co- Mr. Basketballs & Jeff Gildea.**



**Jeff Gildea & Bobby Leonard- 1949 Terre Haute Gertsmeyer, 1953 Indiana University National Champion, 3 Time ABA Champion Indiana Pacers Coach.**

**1965 Indiana Mr. Basketball Billy Keller & Jeff Gildea.**



**"Goose Strong" Indianapolis Arlington High School Friends: FR-Jay Michener, Tim Andres, Dan Hursh, Dave Stricker (Jim Stadick in Photo), MR- Scott O'Connor, Dave Ahearn, Jeff "Goose" Gildea, BR- Bill Meranda, Joe Kukolla & Kevin Ahearn (August 2019.)**

