

Minneapolis councilman, boxer, POW Frank Wolinski dies

By Dan Wascoe Jr.
and Anne O'Connor
Star Tribune Staff Writers

In his 80 years, Frank Wolinski learned a few things about struggle and combat — in the boxing ring, on the Minneapolis City Council, in the real estate business, in Minnesota courts and, during World War II, as a prisoner of war.

But no matter where he fought, he always fought hard.

"It was a pretty colorful life," said his daughter, Julie Flaherty of Eden Prairie. "He lived with a lot of vigor. He always got so into everything he was doing."

Wolinski, of Robbinsdale, died Friday in St. Paul after a 16-year struggle with cancer, and two months after his wife, Ardys, died. They had been married 51 years.

Born in northeast Minneapolis, Wolinski attended North High School and began boxing. He won the featherweight title in the Upper Midwest Golden Gloves tournament in 1939. Later, while a student at the University of Minnesota, he switched to wrestling and was a standout in the Big Ten Conference.

After enlisting in the Air Force

Obituary



Frank Wolinski, shown in 1976, died of cancer.

in 1941 and training as a bombardier, his B-17 was shot down in 1944 during a raid over Bremen, Germany. He was a prisoner in the Stälag Luft 3 prison camp that was featured in the 1963 movie "The Great Escape."

"I didn't do much" during the mass breakout from that camp, Wolinski told the Star Tribune in 1995. "I was a lookout. We called ourselves stooges. We let the diggers know if one of the German agents, a snoop, was in the vicinity. A lot of guys were shot after being recaptured."

Flaherty said her father never talked about the camp when she was young but later told her about helping to keep the breakout a secret. Wolinski was the camp's athletic director and would stage boxing matches on top of the digging. The prisoners would make sure the crowd was

cheering when there was going to be loud work.

"When you think about these 20-year-olds doing this, it's almost surreal," she said.

After the war, he became assistant boxing coach and later head coach at the university.

Flaherty said that as a child, she never understood her father's passion for boxing and other sports, but he told her that for a lot of boys, sports changed their lives.

"Boxing was a way out of poverty," Flaherty said. "It changed their lives so much."

When Wolinski was elected to the Minneapolis City Council in 1951, he focused on building up the park system in north and northeast Minneapolis.

His son, Tom Wolinski of Taos, N.M., said his dad was like a surrogate father to many neighborhood kids and that their home was the neighborhood gathering place.

His father always said that if you just showed up, you could make a difference, and that's how he lived his life until the end.

Wolinski represented the Third Ward, which includes parts of north and northeast Minneapolis, for 10 years before turning

to the real estate business. He specialized in bar and restaurant properties.

Soon after leaving the City Council, he was shot and critically wounded by a man who was angry about his liquor license. Flaherty said that on that day, which was her birthday, her mother was in the hospital giving birth to one of her brothers. The family learned about the shooting on television.

"There were a lot of ups and downs," Flaherty said.

Tom Wolinski said he remembers the court battles when he was a boy that involved his father.

In 1961, a jury acquitted Wolinski on a charge that he had an unlawful financial interest — while he was an alderman — in a health club licensed by the city.

In 1977, he also was acquitted of theft charges related to the sale of a liquor license.

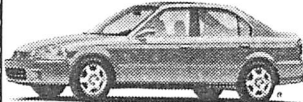
In 1976, he was convicted of perjury in a case involving a liquor-license application and was sentenced to three years in prison. But new evidence in 1977 prompted a judge to set aside the verdict and grant a new trial. The county dropped the case.

In addition to his daughter

Flaherty and son Tom Wolinski, survivors include sons Michael Ferguson of St. Paul, Steven Wolinski of Richfield, and Philip Wolinski of Elk River; five sisters and two brothers.

Visitation will be held 5 to 8 p.m. Tuesday at Gearty-Delmore chapel in Robbinsdale, including a 6:30 p.m. prayer service. Services are scheduled at 10 a.m., Wednesday at the Church of St.

Civic Pride



4.9%⁰APR

Luther **HOPKINS** 612.938.1717
HONDA
www.lutherauto.com

2 FREE
OF S
with any auto!