



## Raymond "Ray" Valeika

May 24, 1942 - July 10, 2021

Raymond Valeika passed away peacefully at home on July 10, 2021. Ray was born in Kaunas, Lithuania, in 1942 to Florijonas and Ann Valeika. His father was a noted composer and conductor of the Lithuanian Military orchestra who, as a young man, had played flute in the private orchestra of the mother of Nicholas Romanov, the last Czar of Russia. Florijonas fought for the Russian Army in World War I but deserted when the Red Army attempted to conscript him to fight in the Russian Revolution. When the Soviets took Lithuania in 1944, Florijonas's ties to the previous regime and his refusal to fight for the Revolution made him a marked man. The Valeika family, including a three-year-old Ray and an infant brother, fled under cover of darkness in a horse-drawn cart. They had to cross Soviet-occupied Eastern Europe, hiding in barns and basements, until they made it to Allied-occupied Bavaria. Ray's baby brother did not survive the journey.

Ray's family was randomly assigned to an American-run Displaced Person's camp, where they would spend the next six years. Despite the hardships he endured, Ray always described this time as an idyllic childhood, playing in ruined castles and shot-down airplanes in the Bavarian forests. His sister, Ramona, was born during their time in Germany. At age nine, Ray's family was able to emigrate to the United States through the sponsorship of a Catholic charity.

The Valeikas settled in East Saint Louis, Illinois. Again, despite growing up in difficult conditions, Ray always spoke fondly of his childhood as an immigrant playing with kids from many different backgrounds. He excelled at sports and earned a basketball scholarship to St. Joseph's College in Indiana. During his freshman year, his parents passed away within six months of each other, and Ray had to return home to care for his sister.

A life-changing stroke of luck occurred when a Dean at Saint Louis University heard about his circumstances and offered him a full scholarship. He enrolled at SLU's Parks College of Engineering, Aviation and Technology, setting him on his lifelong path in the Aviation Industry, where he got to travel the world, one of his greatest passions. Ray worked for

several airlines for the next 40 years including Eastern, Pan Am, Continental, and Delta, where he retired as Senior Vice President of Technical Operations in 2004. At that time, he oversaw a maintenance organization with over 10,000 employees and was responsible for a fleet of 700 aircraft. His office was in the hangar, and he constantly walked the floor to maintain personal relationships with employees at all levels, earning him the nickname, "The Wrench." He received many accolades in the industry, including the Air Transport Association Nuts and Bolts award in 1996. He was an internationally recognized leader and innovator in the world of airline maintenance and technical operations. He served on several boards including those of NASA and the National Academy of Sciences, and served on the Executive Board of ATL Partners until his death.

He met his beloved wife Tyra, a flight attendant for Eastern, on an airplane. They were married from 1967 until her death in 2018. Along the way they had two children, Cheryl, and Steven. Ray was a phenomenal father, treasuring family time despite a busy career. He brought his kids on trips around the world, instilling in them the same love of travel, different places, and different people that he always had.

Ray's experience as a refugee and an immigrant and his realization of the American Dream would define his personality and worldview. He paid forward the kindness he received early on in his philanthropic work. The most notable example was his work with the Community Mayor's Association of New York where he organized an annual "flight to the North Pole" for disabled children. The children boarded a Pan Am plane that would taxi out to the runway, pretend to takeoff, and then return to a hangar decorated like the North Pole, complete with Santa and presents. He brought this tradition with him to Continental and Delta.

Ray made friends very easily and in great numbers. In fact, he would run into friends and acquaintances in distant airports and cities with such frequency that it became a running joke in the family anytime they traveled, wondering when the next random encounter with an old friend would occur. He also felt a kinship with other immigrants and would often ask people where they were from if he heard an accent.

Ray was a great father, husband, grandfather, and friend to many. He had a tremendous work ethic and an even greater love of life which was evident to anyone who knew him. He is survived by his daughter Cheryl Stenz and her children Charlotte, Will, and Jack, and son Steve and his wife Katie and their daughters Lillian and Vivian, as well as his niece Sandra Myatt and nephew Jim Alvey. He is preceded in death by his parents, sister, brother, two half-brothers, his wife Tyra, and son-in-law Chris Stenz.

A service will be held at 10 a.m., Thursday, July 22, at St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Marietta, with a reception to follow at Governors Towne Club in Acworth. Masks are required for nonvaccinated guests. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Community Mayor's Association of New York. Arrangements made under the caring guidance of Mayes Ward-Dobbins Funeral Home & Crematory Macland Chapel, Powder Springs, GA.

# Events

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**JUL**   **Memorial Mass**                      10:00AM

**22**

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St. Joseph Catholic Church

87 Lacy Street, Marietta, GA, US, 30060

# Comments

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“ Dear Ray Valieka Family, I knew Ray backin the good old days at Pan Am Maintenance JFK, having first met him after starting in Engrg there in 1969. Liked working there & Ray was our leader for many years until the demise of Pan Am in 1991. Ray went to Continental & I went to USAir in PIT & lost touch, but I still think of him as a former colleague & friend. Sorry to hear of his passing & send you my condolence & sympathy. Former Old Pan Am Engr, Walt Winkler

**Walter Winkler** - August 15 at 08:26 AM

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“ Dear Valeika family,  
We are all saddened by the passing of our friend Ray Valeika. His outstanding career in the aeronautical profession and his special philanthropy and caring make us proud to have known him.  
I was his "big brother" in the Phi Alpha Chi fraternity at Parks College. He was a good and serious student ; social and liked by all ; and soft spoken about his family's hardships.  
He was also a fine addition to our Chi championship intramural basketball team.  
Tom Vonder Haar

**Tom Vonderhaar** - July 25 at 06:58 PM

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“ The obituary, talking about when he was at Delta, says: "At that time, he oversaw a maintenance organization with over 10,000 employees and was responsible for a fleet of 700 aircraft. His office was in the hangar, and he constantly walked the floor to maintain personal relationships with employees at all levels..."  
This is true. I hired on as a mechanic at Delta in 1998 at 20 years old. I remember on my 21st birthday I was working on a Boeing 737 nose landing gear. Somebody called my name. I ducked and came out of the wheel well, and was shocked to see Ray Valeika right there in front of me. He smiled, did he shake my hand, or put his hand on my shoulder? I don't remember. But he wished me a happy birthday. That has been a warm memory whenever I think back on it, and I hope to always care about people individually the same way he did then.

**Christopher Fulmer** - July 22 at 12:55 PM

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“Wish all neighbors were as nice and wonderful like Ray and Tyra. Rest In Peace, My Friend. You will always have the greatest view of all the golf tournaments played right there in Heaven. Rob Davis

**ROB DAVIS** - July 22 at 08:45 AM

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“Ray was a wonderful Uncle. I remember the visits that he, Tyra, Cheryl and Steve would make every Easter to Illinois when I was a kid very vividly. I still cherish those moments to this day. He would always do this thing with his finger when one of us kids would be upset about something and call it the funny finger. No it wasn't the finger you might think it was, it was his pointer finger. As time went on the visits became few and far between. I kept in touch with him by phone quite often for the last several years. Would talk about family, aerospace and general bull, but I'm going to miss are lengthy talks about his favorite baseball team and mine The St. Louis Cardinals. He was a great person in so many ways. I thought of him as a second Dad. I'm truly going to miss you Uncle Ray. Res in peace. I love you. Jim Alvey



**Jim Alvey** - July 21 at 10:37 PM

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“Lovely One Spathiphyllum Plant was purchased for the family of Raymond "Ray" Valeika.



July 21 at 09:30 AM

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“ Betty Jo and Joe Adams purchased the Beautiful Heart Bouquet for the family of Raymond "Ray" Valeika.



Joe Adams - July 21 at 09:16 AM

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“ Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Raymond "Ray" Valeika.



July 21 at 09:14 AM

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“ Divine Peace Bouquet was purchased for the family of Raymond "Ray" Valeika.



July 20 at 07:22 PM

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“ Ray was an extraordinary man who had such insight--and was willing to share it to make the aviation industry and everyone in it better. He was inquisitive, impactful and kind--and such a gentleman. Here is a tribute that we published on Aviation Week about him: <https://aviationweek.com/mro/tribute-ray-valeika-1942-2021>

My condolences.

Lee Ann Shay - July 20 at 04:44 PM

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“ I shared a few times with Ray while I was in Aviation industry with International Aero Engines. The middle-age Ray that I knew was everything others before me have posted - a pure gentleman with conviction, a conversationalist with anyone he met with his ever present smile. My most vivid memory was a time we shared together in British Columbia as mutual guests of Airbus Industry. I witnessed him land a Tyee, a King Salmon of over 40 lbs. my enlarged and framed photo of him with that Salmon hung in his Delta office awhile. Was a privilege for me that God had our paths cross. Condolences to his family. What a legacy he left as an example to aspire to.

ken parkany - July 19 at 06:05 PM

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“ Ray always had a smile on his face for you when you would see him. Always took time to talk to us mechanics. His window was above our shop (CF34) and when we would see him looking out, he would wave all the time. He came down and talked with a few of us numerous times, but the last day before he retired, he spent about an hour or so telling us some stories and how much he was going to miss us. Loved that time he was there.

Bruce - July 19 at 03:00 PM

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“ Ray visited me when I was working the Delta Aeroflot contract in Moscow. As we are both Lithuanian, ( my mother escaped Lithuania in 1944, she is currently 89) we struck up a conversation in which I believe Ray contacted my mother about visiting Lithuania as we had been there a few times shortly after the Soviets pulled out. My understanding is he was able to return for a visit. It must have been a painful but enjoyable journey. Men like Ray (and my mother) were " forged by the fire", and a rarity in today's times....another legendary Lithuanian. It was a pleasure knowing you Ray, Rest in peace, job well done.  
Richard Gaysowski

richard gaysowski - July 19 at 01:57 PM

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“ Best VP at Pan Am and Delta. Even the union guys liked him. Thanks for the great aviation memories Ray.

Frank Rivera - July 19 at 12:08 PM

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“ A V.P with a restroom dedicated to him.

john osse - July 19 at 11:25 AM

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“ Ray & Trya were a wonderful couple . Trya was a LADY w/ CLASS and Ray could get along w/ anybody. He ALWAYS had a SMILE in greeting people. I wonder if he'll be cooking the steaks up at " THE GATE" as he did in the breezeway on ROBIN Ct.....even during snow storms. He liked his steak. R.I.P. The McDonald's of Huntington. Station

Dennis Mcdonald - July 19 at 10:12 AM

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“ Ray was a treasured member of the Carnival Cruise Line Safety Board for several years. We appreciated the insights and stories he freely shared with us. It was clear to us at Carnival that Ray had lived a remarkable life in maintaining aircraft but more importantly, in leading people.

Rest in peace, Ray.

Bill Burke  
Chief Maritime Officer  
Carnival Corporation

Bill Burke - July 18 at 02:55 PM

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“ A fantastic leader! We need more leaders, mentors and friends such as Ray. When you made a mistake he took you aside, and in a Papa Bear way and set you straight. Made sure you knew and understood your error and then set you on your way. It was over. You learned from your mistake and then he'd share a cup with you. I truly enjoyed working for Ray, "Papa Bear".

Ken Nowling - July 15 at 07:41 PM

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“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Ana Phang - July 15 at 06:07 PM



“ Thank you Ray for your support. You will be missed.

Ana Phang - July 15 at 06:08 PM

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“ I fondly remember his leadership and to the point meetings. No nonsense for sure, but a great and kind person. On one of his pass throughs of TOC 2 in the dead of winter, he was astonished at how cold it was inside. He was told there were problems with the old radiator heaters in the rafters (age/disrepair). The next day, there were guys on high jackers swapping out the old ones for new! Stayed toasty from then on. He cared about his coworkers! God speed Ray

Brad Crawford - July 15 at 05:14 PM

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“ Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Raymond "Ray" Valeika.



July 15 at 04:48 PM

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“ You will be deeply missed Uncle Ray. I will miss our emails checking in with one another. I love you!

Sandra - July 15 at 01:19 PM

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“ Ray was a no nonsense leader. He had great visions for Tech Ops. Really liked and respected him

**Larry Kilgore** - July 15 at 12:47 PM

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“ Ray was a huge part of the success of Delta. He was a great leader and he was missed when he left the Delta leadership team. Prayers for comfort for his family and thank you for sharing him with us.

**Gary Taylor** - July 15 at 11:31 AM

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“ New Ray during his Delta Airline days. A great leader, a great man. This world today needs more men like Ray in it.

**Ed Glinsky** - July 15 at 10:45 AM



“ Please excuse the spelling error. Not any disrespect for Ray.

**Ed Glinsky** - July 15 at 10:50 AM

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“ I met Ray about 12 years ago at an industry event. He was an excellent story teller, very engaging and made me feel like a friend right off the bat. He and Ron Utecht ganged up on me to get back into the airline business which I did with Delta shortly after meeting him. I know he is well respected by his former colleagues here at Delta and will be greatly missed.

**Mike Moore**

**Mike Moore** - July 15 at 10:26 AM

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“ Ray was a wonderful friend of more than 60+ years. Truly an American success story of great achievement from a humble refugee beginning. I admired and loved him. Our sincere condolences to Cheryl, Steve, and all your family. Your Dad was a great friend and I will truly miss him.  
“God bless you Ray and may He lift you up in His “grace and mercy”.  
Roly and Diane

**Roland Gaasch** - July 15 at 12:59 AM

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“ Ray and I both belonged to an airline chat group of several hundred. Through this i learned a lot about Ray's history at several airlines including the top maintenance job at Delta. By "maintenance job" i mean VP, keeping 800+ aircraft operating 100% of the time. And there was nothing Ray did not know about how airplanes worked, how to fix them, how to keep costs down and please many varied constituents. And overall Ray was the most affable fellow around, was funny, was one of the smartest airplane guys ever. He will be missed greatly by the hundreds in our chat group and very much by me .Ray - I'll catch you downline.

**jack keady** - July 14 at 01:11 PM

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“ I will truly miss Ray. Ray was my best friend in college and we kept in close contact since. He was in my wedding and my oldest son's Godfather. His life story is truly amazing and his accomplishments legendary. However, he was most proud of his family. My sincere condolences to Cheryl, Steve and the extended family. I love you pal.

**Robert Nester** - July 13 at 08:08 PM



“ Ray was amazing, he and his sister were essentially orphans. Their parents died when Ray was just out of high school. He raised his younger sister, sent her through boarding school, at time hid her from social workers and relatives who did not approve. He worked full time nights to support them, and spent full time days in engineering school. He managed to engage in fraternity events like the rest of us. His tales of refugee life were happy, playing war with real equipment in former military areas. Most memorable, remarkable person I ever met. Yes, I did run into him in an airport. Some of lived at times in the run down east St. Louis family home where he was raised. We all had leave if his sister was home, no ammunition for the social workers. We will miss you, Ray  
Condolences to the family,

**Jeff Dornette** - July 20 at 05:14 PM



“ I like to think that Ray and Mike Surwald are together again and telling stories about parties and nights at the Ranch. I miss both of them, they were always together.

Ron Mathis

**Ron Mathis** - July 22 at 08:23 AM



“ Ray you will be missed. From one old "airliner" to another we certainly had some animated talks. To your family, there are just no words to make this better. You will be in my prayers.



**Carelen Waller** - July 13 at 06:38 PM



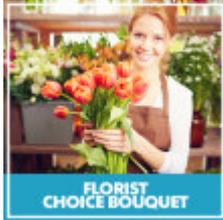
“ Cheryl, Steven and family...I'm so sorry about your loss.What I will remember most about your dad was that he was a master storyteller - I LOVED listening to him. He was a dynamic, engaging personality and will be missed. I'm a phone call away if you need anything.

Dianne Acuna Andree - July 13 at 01:53 PM

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“ Florist Choice Bouquet was purchased for the family of Raymond "Ray" Valeika.



July 13 at 01:07 PM

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“ Glenn Hurley lit a candle in memory of Raymond "Ray" Valeika



Glenn Hurley - July 13 at 12:31 PM



“ Ray was a wonderful friend of more than 60+ years. Truly an American success story of great achievement from a humble refugee beginning. I admired and loved him. Our sincere condolences to Cheryl, Steve, and all your family. Your Dad was a great friend and I will truly miss him.

“God bless you Ray and may He lift you up in His “grace and mercy”.

Roly and Diane

Roland Gaasch - July 15 at 12:57 AM



“ Ray was an excellent leader of Delta TechOps! He cared about all the people and we had a lot of respect for him because his actions showed that he cared. We were blessed to have him just like we are blessed to have our current leadership.

Neil Sutherland - July 16 at 04:08 PM