



## Richard Leonard Przybyla

March 3, 1924 - October 20, 2020

Richard Leonard Przybyla

1924-2020

### Summary

Richard (Dick) Leonard Przybyla was born March 3, 1924 and died October 20, 2020. He is survived by his sister Helen, his children and their spouses, John and Linda Przybyla, Jim and Jill Przybyla and Anne and Paul Heyt, as well as grandchildren Laralynne, Ben, Becki, Stephanie, Richie, Jaime, Chris, Jacob and April and his great grandchild Ellie Przybyla.

### Growing Up

Richard (Dick) Przybyla was born and raised in Detroit, Michigan. His father, Jan immigrated to Detroit from Poland after WWI and landed a job as employee #17 at Fisher Body which produced car frames for the major car manufacturers. Jan sent money back to his wife Stella in Poland, who was raising their daughters Wanda, Jenny and Henrietta near Krakow. When he didn't send for them, Stella obtained passage to bring her and the children over to America and found him in Detroit. Helen and Richard were born in the US to complete the household. Jan kept working for Fisher throughout of the depression. Although the plant was shuttered, his seniority landed him a job maintaining the plant's buildings. He purchased a car which was unusual at the time and took the family to Belle Isle on weekend outings to the extensive park and zoo. Although he didn't read or speak English and thus had no access to any repair manuals he maintained the car himself and Dick said he

could take anything on it apart and repair it himself. Stella was a ward captain for the Democratic party and she also worked at various jobs to help keep the family solvent. Dick was raised in a Polish community and spoke only Polish until he started school. His childhood interests including fishing and playing baseball on the street and he began working at age 12 to help support the family during the depression.

### WWII Service

Dick entered the Army Air Corps in early 1942 at age 18. He was trained as a hydraulic specialist servicing PB5A planes and deployed in the 2nd Emergency Rescue Squadron, Squadron D in New Guinea. These “flying boats” were primarily used for the sea rescue of downed airmen in the ocean. Dick’s squadron followed the American island-hopping strategy, moving from Leo in New Guinea to Biak to Morotai to Zambowanga as the advance to the Philippines occurred. Besides servicing planes at the airfield, mechanics were flown to disabled aircraft to fix them so they could return them to base. The squadron lost four PB5As a month over the first year and a half.

Dick was re-trained as a flight engineer where his duties included keeping the gas balanced in the wings and controlling the fuel/air mixture for maximum range without overheating the engines as well as dealing with any mechanical issues during the flight. Flights from Morotai supporting Philippine action were 12 hours long. The PB5As had a tendency to pop rivets on the bottom of the hull when landing on a rough sea was required to pick up airmen. The flight engineer needed to stick pencils in the rivet holes to minimize the flooding of the plane while the crew raced to rescue the airmen before the PB5A became too heavy to take off.

His squadron was involved in the Indianapolis rescue after it was sunk on a secret mission delivering the first atomic bomb. The squadron received the Presidential Unit citation for their service. Dick received his discharge in early 1946 during the wind down after WWII was over.

### Mt Washington

Dick’s interest in aviation continued when he worked testing airfoil icing

performance using a wind tunnel on the top of Mt Washington in New Hampshire. The mountain recorded the fastest wind gust ever recorded on the face of the Earth at 231 mph in 1934. The wind velocity there averages 32 mph all year long. The staffers would take a snow cat up for a 30 day stint, after which they would ski down to the village below for a month off. Warming huts along the route allowed a respite in case the habitually bad weather worsened during the journey. Dick passed the time in the remote village as a young bachelor.

#### Education and Diamond Crystal Salt

Dick attended the University of Michigan briefly, then graduated from Wayne State University via the GI bill with a bachelor's degree in Chemical Engineering. His first job was at Diamond Crystal Salt in St. Claire Michigan. The plant had a central motor and overhead drive shaft with belt driven power takeoffs to run the individual tools used to make salt. The big innovation at his time there was adding Iodine to salt. Dick met his wife of 60 years, Bess who worked at Diamond Crystal as a secretary. Dick told his sister Helen that she was the only one who didn't pay attention to him. Eventually he asked her out to a ballgame and wore his best suit for the date, but he was highly overdressed compared to the crowd that wore casual attire to the ball game.

#### Dow Corning and Family Life

When Diamond Crystal salt laid off its research staff, Dick got a job at Dow Corning in Midland MI.

Bess also got a job as a secretary at Dow Chemical in Midland. Dick worked as a polymer chemist, specializing in custom formulations of silicone rubber to meet temperature, elasticity, hardness, and chemical inertness requirements of the diverse set of applications that needed the special attributes of the rubber. Among his many inventions was a formulation for the window seals of American spacecraft. The original formulation outgassed in the vacuum of space which caused a fogged view of the planet below for the astronauts. NASA bestowed a medal to Dick in recognition of his successful formulation.

The actual manufacturing process was dangerous and to safeguard it, Dick designed a machine with a reinforced bulkhead that faced the operator and an aluminum foil back wall which faced a large empty courtyard. When the machine exploded, as it was prone to do occasionally, the energy was directed “safely” into the empty courtyard, and the machine was rebuilt to continue making the product for NASA.

Dick and Bess had three children; John, Jim and Anne. He built a backstop for neighborhood ball games in our backyard and later bought a trailer which the family took on various trips including several memorable winter trips to Florida. Dick kindled the imagination in his children by bringing home silicone rubber articles he had recently formulated and built including silly putty, RTV, long elastic strands used for launching model gliders and so on. John, Anne and Jim all graduated from engineering school at Michigan State and had successful careers.

Another of Dick’s interests was building and flying radio-controlled model airplanes when the sport was in its infancy. The winter season in Michigan was used for constructing new planes which had their maiden flight in early spring. Over the course of the season; mechanical failures, radio interference and pilot error caused crashes of varying severity and despite repair efforts, the cumulative effect was to reduce the air worthiness of the aircraft over the course of the summer. Dick was fearless with his airplanes, sending them up when the other pilots at the club decided to wait for better weather, and also affecting field repairs to minor crackups with straight pins, thread and whatever else was on hand rather than missing an opportunity to fly. We would arrive at the flying field with three serviceable airplanes and return home with a dozen or so pieces of airplanes. On one memorable occasion, a powered glider was at maximum height of around 500 feet when the wing fell off. The streamlined body plowed 6” into a nearby plowed field. As we approached the crash site, the offending wing came fluttering down like a leaf

and landed completely unharmed. Dick used fiberglass to repair the body and added nylon wing bolts to hold the wing more securely. We flew it many times afterwards but it's ability to soar for extended periods as a glider was negatively affected.

On occasion the planes would try to escape the abuse by refusing to respond to controls and fly some distance away from the field before coming to earth. The whole family was then called out to traipse through the extensive cornfields surrounding the club's airfield to search for the missing plane. At the end of the season the more battered aircraft were retired, and new versions were constructed over the subsequent winter.

Dick spent one winter season building a full-sized wooden frame catamaran sailboat of his own design in our basement which was then wrapped in fiberglass and painted. When it came time to move it outside, the pontoon wouldn't negotiate the bend in the stairs in a faux pas reminiscent of Henry Ford. Ultimately, we pushed it out a casement window. Dick liked to take it for jaunts on nearby Wixom and Sanford reservoirs where it pre-dated Hobie cats and was one of the fastest boats on the lake.

Dick travelled extensively for Dow Corning and was often accompanied by Bess to over sea destinations. After he retired, he was re-hired as a consultant and with the aid of another engineer who tested the formulations, he developed a line of 20 silicon rubbers in a single year. The new lineup had virtually all the attributes needed for the many applications Dick had encountered over the years. This line replaced hundreds of custom formulations allowing larger batch sizes and lower prices to compete with General Electric which had entered the silicone rubber business after key patents of Dow Corning expired. When this job was complete, he retired again. Dick and Bess sold their house in Midland along with much of their accumulated possessions and travelled the country for an extended period in

a small trailer, surveying locations for retirement. They purchased a home on the west coast near Santa Barbara in Morro Bay California in the early 1980s. Dick was promptly rehired by Dow Corning a second time and posted overseas. They lived in Taiwan and Korea for around 6 months each and visited the entire far east visiting customers. Dick gave over 100 technical talks in 10 countries over the course of his extended career.

## Retirement

In retirement Dick continued flying airplanes, tinkering with electronics and became familiar with computers. He mastered publishing and produced monthly newsletters with family updates, editorials and attachments of articles and snippets he had come across and thought would be of general interest. He produced hundreds of newsletters over the course of more than 20 years which he distributed among his family and friends. He also wrote a series of articles that constituted his memoirs of growing up, WWII and his extensive travels. There was a major role reversal as Bess' health declined and Dick took up the cooking and cleaning chores. His limited previous experience in such matters required a steep learning curve.

Dick and Bess moved to West Hills Assisted living in Corvallis Oregon around 8 years ago when Bess' declining health required that she use a wheelchair. Jim and especially Jill included them in events, provided some fresh produce and assisted in everyday chores. Dick was still active and mobile when they moved to town and cared dutifully for Bess. Dick's mobility was limited in later years after a fall that broke his neck, but he continued to write his memoirs and managed his affairs and medications until his death at age 96. He viewed a great many transformations in his life including the widespread adoption of the automobile, central heat, refrigeration, suburbia, radio and subsequent electronics including personal computers. He was the first in his family to go to college and he actively participated in important events like aviation, WWII

and silicone rubber products.

Please share your thoughts and memories for the family at [www.demossturda.com](http://www.demossturda.com).

# Tribute Wall

MH

“ 6 files added to the album May 2018 visit - Rick & Margie



Margie Hallmark - November 08, 2020 at 01:24 PM

JP

“ 3 files added to the tribute wall



Jim Przybyla - November 03, 2020 at 10:55 AM

JP

“ 7 files added to the tribute wall



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**Jim Przybyla** - November 03, 2020 at 06:30 AM

JP

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



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**Jim Przybyla** - November 03, 2020 at 06:27 AM

JP

*1942 Coast Guard ID photo*

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**Jim Przybyla** - November 03, 2020 at 06:28 AM

JP

“ 4 files added to the album Dick - Recent Photos



Jim Przybyla - November 03, 2020 at 05:58 AM

JP

“ 4 files added to the album Dick - The early years



Rescue Squadron is cited for outstanding  
1945 to 15 April 1945 in conducting ex-  
ing missions through the vast area comp-  
in the Netherlands East Indies, the Sea  
Flying through adverse weather in low-  
and aircraft, frequently without fighter  
in dangerously heavy seas, often under  
ers in distress. In 7 hazardous open sea  
see and heightened naval and air activity,  
es, while the activities of the rescue sta-  
evacuated from enemy territory. The excep-  
to duty of the personnel of the 2nd Group  
to the success of the Bureau and Southern.

Jim Przybyla - November 03, 2020 at 05:52 AM