



shirley

Kear Valentine

Sadly, Chuck Kear passed away on May 11, 1980, due to a massive heart attack. However, the hard-working and personable Shirley Kear did what she has always done and she kept on 'keeping on.'

and Shirley has now moved on with it. "I don't really remember what one thing actually changed, but I know that as women, we just had to learn to stand our ground and be accepted. Along the way we've had promoters, car owners, and drivers that are women. This was a business I chose to be in with my husband, and I couldn't stay home, so, I brought the kids too, when it was time," notes Kear.

Shirley Kear married Tom Valentine in 1982, though he passed away in 1991. Since then,

Said Kear, "To tell you there is one memory that stands out to me would be hard to do, my life in racing has been full of fond memories, from pulling Bobby Davis, Jr., into the pits at Oklahoma City to handing Steve Kinser his trophy at Eldora when he won the Historical Big One. In between has been many memories with family and racers that I could talk about all day. Such as flat tires and wheels coming off the truck when traveling, or meeting the Australians, traveling in California, and having the kids involved every step of the way."

by Todd Ridgeway

Shirley was born on May 18, 1940, to parents Roy and Treva Perkins. She had five sisters and four brothers, and they all grew up on the family farm.

She married Charles Odell "Chuck" Kear in 1959. Chuck was very mechanical and loved auto racing. It didn't take long for her to possess his passion for motorsports.

In 1969, Chuck and Shirley started Kears Speed Shop in Tiffin, Ohio, stocking mostly high-performance street parts and drag racing equipment in the early years. They soon moved into oval-track stock car racing parts. And Chuck had two gas stations, too.

However, this was around the same time as the birth of C.H. "Bud" Miller's All Star Circuit of Champions (ASCoC) in sprint car racing in 1970. Thus, by 1973, Chuck and Shirley were full-bore into sprint car racing, complete with an armed parts truck and a sponsorship of friend Rick Ferkel and his number 0 sprint car. At the time, United States Auto Club (USAC) car owners Ray & Cecilia 'Cissy' Smith had Smith's Speed Shop in Eaton, Ohio, a town in the southwestern part of the state. According to Shirley Kear, "Ray Smith has to be given all the credit for helping us get started. I used to call him for everything."

In March of 1978, Ted Johnson had started the World of Outlaws (WoO). In 1979, Bert Emick formed the Midwest Outlaw Super Series (MOSS) and, by the following season, Bert was leading the newly-reformed ASCoC. Sprint car racing in the Midwest, and around the country, was flourishing between USAC, Ted Johnson's WoO and Bert Emick's ASCoC. Kears Speed Shop was there for everyone's benefit, at home in Tiffin and 'on the road' with their trucks.

their rolling speed shop has been staffed by Shirley and children Micki, Tim and Vicki. As she says, "The family has always been a part of the speed shop to this day. When the kids, Micki, Tim, and Vicki, were growing up, they never knew of anything else but racing. Today, Micki and her husband, Mark, have taken over the running of the speed shop."

She continues, "Over the years, we have grown with the kids and shop together; my youngest, Vicki, grew up with racers as friends and vacations at the track. Micki left for a while to go to college to become a nurse and start a family, only to return with her husband and family to the speed shop. Kids have always been a large part of our life and racing, this has truly been our life. When Tim was sick we looked to our racing friends for support as well."

Shirley's son, Timothy Odell Kear, passed away in 2003. Micki is married to Mark Tusing, and Vicki is married to Jason Wickham. Mark and Micki's son Craig, a school teacher, also helps with Kears Speed Shop each summer.

In the 1985 WoO Yearbook, Shirley spoke of her life-long friendship with Rick Ferkel, and her sponsorship of him since 1973, "Rick really helped us. We used to help him with parts and other items."

Later she added, "He traveled from coast to coast and kept us aware of what we needed to add to our trailers, as well as making suggestions to help us be able to understand and cater to the racers needs."

As a woman at the race track, Shirley was constricted by the speedway rule book back in the day. In those days, women were not allowed in the pit area. So, when she and Chuck rolled in, she would have to stay in the truck by rule. That rule has long since passed

Shirley Kear Valentine has been involved in many activities in sprint car racing over the years, including starting the Fremont Racers' Flea Market with then Fremont Speedway promoter Gary Kerns, organizing Manufacturers' Give-Away Nights at Fremont, promoting a race at Attica Raceway Park, hosting the Kears Speed Shop annual Open House programs, and supporting the National Sprint Car Hall of Fame & Museum. She also crowned Daryn Pittman, the 2008 Kings Royal champion, at Earl Baltes' Eldora Speedway in Rossburg, Ohio.

But, her biggest legacy is likely just being a true friend to so many sprint car racers. From day one, she has known that it is a tough sport, a dangerous sport, and an expensive sport. No matter what her personal situation has been, she has been there to support the racers, coast-to-coast and border-to-border (and then some). It may have been lending an ear, lending a tool, or supplying parts on credit, but she was there... with that big smile, those twinkling eyes, and always a word of encouragement.

Shirley Kear Valentine continues to live today in Tiffin, Ohio, home of the legendary Kears Speed Shop.