DONORS:


From his wife Sharon:
Floyd was passionate about his interests. Each interest occupied and defined seasons of his life. I was proud to be his wife and partner through many of those seasons and I will miss him forever.

Memories from friends

Floyd caught many things in his life but I count myself as one of his greatest catches. Little did I know, as a young falconry apprentice awakening at 4:00 AM to make the long, dark drive to Frostburg, Maryland to meet Floyd at daybreak in the hopes of trapping my first bird on Big Savage Mountain, that it would be I who would be ensnared by his friendship and faith.

I will forever be thankful to Floyd for being an intrepid guide on the slopes of my life’s mountain. I will do my best to keep the trails marked for the next generation and maybe, just maybe, by his example, I will blaze a few of my own. I’ll see you again on the mountain shortly, my good friend.

My first times with him were on the ridge trapping. My father and I would listen to him expound upon his knowledge informed by years of experience. He could tell the weight of a bird simply by holding it. He was amazing! Often we would pass the prime-time trapping hours well into the evening, just talking in his blind. We became friends. He mentored me in so many ways.

Recently, I had the occasion to instruct a group of Eagle Scouts who had visited to see my birds and learn about falconry. After a couple of hours of bird talk, one parent asked, “where did you learn all of this?” I pointed to Floyd’s picture on the wall and said, “from the master.”

He is now with his master in Heaven. And I long for the day when I will see him again.

Matt Frey

Jason Caldwell
FLOYD E. PRESLEY, JR.

By Jason Caldwell and Matthew Frey

Floyd Presley lived a life outside the safe hedges and soft comfort of convention. It would take a weighty volume written by adventure novelists like of London or Stevenson to chronicle its gritty richness and raw vigor.

Floyd's persona and life were consistent with that of the archetypical heroes in those masculine fables. He grew up rough and tough who, out of necessity, learned to use his fists to defend himself--quite adroitly--when called to do so. He found employment for those skills as a motorcycle gang enforcer and, more gainfully, in the Army National Guard. Despite the hard times, out of concern for maintaining his wits and composure, and as a natural athlete, he eschewed tobacco and alcohol, earning the moniker "Straight Arrow."

Floyd was an avid hunter. Many hunters know their way around the woods but few are true woodsmen. Floyd was the latter. He was an accomplished marksman. After rabbit hunting with a shotgun became too easy, he began hunting with a pistol. He would point and shoot the rabbits on the flush, often with a head-shot. Floyd always used dogs, obedient to voice commands. He bred and trained beagles, black and tan coonhounds, Chesapeake Bay retrievers, dachshunds, and Jack Russell terriers.

In 1963, Floyd found and embraced falconry as the arena in which to exercise his adventurous spirit. Floyd and his brother, Jimmy, along with good friends, George Bittroff, became enthralled by falconry. Soon, Floyd's other brother, Hank, became similarly enthralled. Getting started was not easy for them; they didn't know any falconer. They had as a resource only an old English falconry book. They were determined to become falconers even if it meant walking the difficult learning curve by trial-and-error. They began road trapping red-tails and, after developing a successful training regime, taking squirrels, the area's most abundant quarry. By late 1964, they flew their red-tails in casts of two or three. At the time, there simply wasn't a rule that stated unequivocally that it couldn't be done. They didn't use scales but rather judged a hawk's readiness by her response and the feel of her keel.

Floyd trained many species: American kestrels, a broad-winged hawk, Cooper's hawks, goshawks, a great horned owl, a merlin, a sharp-shinned hawk, red-tailed hawks and many Harris hawks. Floyd successfully flew a peregrine x prairie hybrid, a Harris x Ferruginous hybrid and a Harris x Cooper's hybrid named Mulder (after the X-Files character). Harris and Cooper's were Floyd's favorites.

As a falconer for over fifty years, Floyd caught many kinds of quarry: grey squirrels, cottontail and jackrabbits (both in great numbers), ducks, quail, pheasants, woodcock, ruffed grouse and dove.

In the 1970s, Floyd began breeding Harris’s hawks. His birds were renowned for being talented game-catchers. His best-known bird, Elvis, caught over 1,200 rabbits in his lifetime. Floyd produced over 300 Harris’s hawks. He also bred golden eagles and European sparrowhawks.

In 1978, Floyd became a federal raptor bander. He was a master raptor trainer, banding well over 4,000. Many falconers learned how to trap birds from his mentorship.

Floyd also rehabbed raptors and performed raptor education programs for state parks, schools, camp programs, and, in recent years, for Bible schools.