



## Vainutis Kazys Vaitkevicius

January 12, 1927 - December 24, 2017

Vainutis Kazimieras Vaitkevicius, “Dr. Vee” was born on January 12th, 1927 in Kaunas, Lithuania. He passed December 24th, 2017 at the Omega House Hospice in Houghton, Michigan.

Above all else, his life was defined by his perseverance and compassion, which was shaped by the immense hardships he and his family endured; but more importantly by the people who stood in defiant contrast to the savage turmoil which surrounded them. People who celebrated life, who held a great faith and who shared the deepest sense of compassion.

His father, Henrikas Vaitkevicius was an architectural engineer who died in forced exile in the Ural Mountains, after being arrested for his political convictions. His mother Kamilija Zakaviciute was a nurse who spent years in Siberian labor camps protecting his brothers and mourning her husband’s death.

During his early years, being a musical prodigy, he dreamed of being a concert pianist and was schooled by Jesuits in Kaunas, Lithuania.

On June 14th, 1941 he was separated from his family when he narrowly escaped KGB organized mass arrests that led to the exile of the rest of his family. Finding himself alone he was sheltered by his grandfather, Vytautas

Zakavicius, a strongly opinionated man who was trained as a physician and a botanist. Dr. Vee often spoke about the early lessons he learned from his grandfather. Sadly his grandfather was executed by the Nazis after he was found to have hidden Jewish children, decades later he was recognized by the Jewish Community for this act.

Dr. Vee later lived with his aunt, Dr. Jadvyga Zakaviciute, who was a prominent physician in Lithuania. To avoid the ongoing forced conscriptions by the Nazis she fictitiously diagnosed Dr. Vee with tuberculosis and hid him in a quarantined ward.

As the front of World War II was moving across Lithuania it became clear that it was unsafe to remain in Lithuania and by the end of 1944 Dr. Vee found himself in a Lithuanian refugee camp outside of Frankfurt, Germany. It is there that he started to develop his leadership skills as he was instrumental in establishing a local secondary school for Lithuanian refugees. This is the school that he himself graduated from surrounded by many subsequently well-established classmates including the future president of Lithuania.

Unfortunately, during the same time he injured his hand and was no longer able to play piano, while his dreams were shattered he never lost the love for classical music. In search of a new focus and career he enrolled into seminary but his wishes of priesthood were changed when he met the love of his life, Ingeborg Jansen. His final and ultimate calling became medicine and he graduated from Johann-Wolfgang-Goethe-Universitaet Frankfurt Medical School in 1951. Being a physician was not one of his initial vocational plans, he was once quoted as saying “frequently accidents determine what we do in life” and decades later oncology care in Detroit was forever changed.

His academic career was rich and prolific and expanded the resources of Wayne State University School of Medicine and the Karmanos Cancer Center. He trained and inspired numerous medical students, residents and fellows.

Bolstered by his colleagues and students, their research efforts have fundamentally changed the treatment of several varieties of cancers. Most of all he was very proud of his work with the School of Medicine and once said that it was Wayne State that made his career so successful and if it were not for Wayne State there would not have been a “Dr. Vee”.

In 1951 without much knowledge of English language, he moved to Detroit, Michigan for his post graduate training. In 1953 he began a 2 year stint in the United States Army where he achieved the rank of Captain.

In 1955 he enrolled in residency programs at Detroit Grace Hospital as well as Detroit Receiving Hospital and later completed a fellowship in Medical Oncology at the Detroit Institute for Cancer Research.

In 1959 he served as an attending physician in the Oncology services at Henry Ford Hospital and was later appointed Assistant Professor of Medicine at Wayne State University School of Medicine. In 1962 he was named Clinical Director at the Detroit Institute for Cancer Research. In 1966 was appointed Associate Professor of Medicine at Wayne State University and became the Director of Wayne’s new Division of Conjoint Services and Curriculum in Oncology.

He received on several occasions Best Clinical Teacher Award of the Year from Wayne State School of Medicine and in 1972 was named Professor of Medicine. In 1978 he was named Associate Director for Clinical Activities in the Comprehensive Cancer Institute of Metropolitan Detroit. In 1980 he was recipient of the Wayne State University Leo M. Franklin Award in Human Relations. In 1981 he was recipient of a Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Cancer Society as well as recipient of Wayne State’s Lawrence M. Weiner Award.

In 1982 he was named Physician In-Chief at the Detroit Medical Center and the Chief of Medicine at Harper Grace Hospital.

1987 he was honored by the e Detroit News as a Michiganian-of-the-Year and became the recipient of the Tree-of-Life Award by the National Jewish Federation.

1994 he was named Professor Emeritus and then President Bill Clinton appointed Dr. Vee to the National Cancer Advisory Board which is based in Bethesda, Maryland. He was also the recipient of the Scientist of the Year Award from the Scientific Committee of the Cancer, AIDS and Immunology Research Institute at Bar Ilian University in Israel.

1995 he played a pivotal role in establishment of the Barbara Ann Karmanos Cancer Institute and later became medical director of the home care and hospice. In 2000 he was named Interim President of the Karmanos Cancer Institute as well as Interim Chief of Wayne's Division of Hematology-Oncology.

He was preceded in death by his beloved wife Ingeborg and survived by his daughters Eva Marks and Camille and his sons, Henrikas, Peter, Walter and Martin.

Visitation will be held Monday, January 1st from 2-8 p.m. with a 4 p.m. prayer service at the Wm. Sullivan & Son Funeral Home, 705 W 11 Mile Road (4 blocks E of Woodward), Royal Oak. In state Tuesday, January 2nd from 9:30 a.m. until the time of the Funeral Mass at 10 a.m. at St. Mary Catholic Church, 730 S Lafayette, Royal Oak.

It is the family's wish that rather than flowers, donations be made to the Karmanos Cancer Center, as a tribute to his life's goal to improve the

treatment and care of cancer patients.

# Previous Events

## Visitation

JAN 1. 2:00 PM - 8:00 PM (ET)

Wm. Sullivan and Son Funeral Directors-Royal Oak  
705 W. Eleven Mile Road  
Royal Oak, MI 48067  
(248) 541-7000  
royal@sullivanfh.com  
<https://www.sullivanfuneraldirectors.com/>

## Prayer Service

JAN 1. 4:00 PM (ET)

Wm. Sullivan and Son Funeral Directors-Royal Oak  
705 W. Eleven Mile Road  
Royal Oak, MI 48067  
(248) 541-7000  
royal@sullivanfh.com  
<https://www.sullivanfuneraldirectors.com/>

## In-State At Church

JAN 2. 9:30 AM - 10:00 AM (ET)

St. Mary Catholic Church  
730 S. Lafayette Avenue  
Royal Oak, MI 48067

## Funeral Mass

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JAN 2. 10:00 AM (ET)

St. Mary Catholic Church  
730 S. Lafayette Avenue  
Royal Oak, MI 48067

# Tribute Wall

TM

“ I want to offer my sincere condolences to the family of Dr. Vee. Obviously, he was well-known for his clinical expertise, his abiding interest in cancer research, and, importantly, the love he had for his patients. He was truly an extremely nice human being. We are extremely fortunate to have had Dr. Vee in Detroit. His legacy will live on.

I became well-acquainted with Dr. Vee in the middle 1960's when I was on the administrative staff of The Grace Hospital. Roger DeBusk, M.D., Director of the hospital allocated an entire nursing unit in Grace's Central Unit to Dr. Vee and his medical staff for their inpatient care of oncology patients. During the 1960s, there were often long waiting lists of patients waiting to be admitted and I remember that some members of the medical staff were not particularly happy with Dr. DeBusk's decision to allocate probably about 30-35 beds to Dr. Vee and his staff! But, without a doubt, Dr. DeBusk made the correct decision.

Tom Coles, M.D. (Grace Hospital, 1960-1980)

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Tom Coles, MD - January 09, 2018 at 03:19 PM

PP

“ My husband was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2002 in Florida. We came back to Michigan and began treatment, but when we were fortunate enough to consult with Dr. V at Karmanos, we knew we were in the right place. Dr. V treated Ron aggressively and gave him 16 more months of life before the disease overcame him. Dr. V was informative and helpful and we always trusted his judgment. I will always be grateful that we found him when we did.

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Patricia Pank - January 07, 2018 at 12:42 PM

LK

“ Dr. Vee was a special mentor to Marilyn A.T. Sauder, M.D., FACS. They shared not only a love of music but also of classical music. So highly respected and encouraging especially during difficult time of Residency. Dr. Sauder preceded him in death, but she would have wanted his family to know how much influence he had on her life and career. A truly special person.

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**LaRea Kremhelmer** - January 05, 2018 at 03:47 PM

SV

“ I am so sorry that I just now heard of the death of Doctor Vee. He was of great comfort to my sister who passed away 16 years ago - - Sister Francilene Van de Vyver - - from Madonna University in Livonia, MI. Please know that your family is being remembered in prayer by the Felician Sisters. Earth's loss is now Heaven's gain. With Sincere Sympathy, Sister Joyce Van de Vyver

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**Sister Joyce Van de Vyver** - January 04, 2018 at 01:32 PM

SS

“ My deepest sympathy to the family. May God bring you peace knowing the blessings Dr. "Vee" brought to the world. He was a wonderful physician and good man. I had interactions with him when I worked at the Hutzel OB/GYN department and we often sought his counsel and wisdom for our oncology patients. I also personally sought his advice as a fellow Baltic countryman for a family member with cancer. Dr. V. did us a favor by recommending the best physician at Karamanos. I am a Latvian and was always proud of the brilliant Lithuanian from the Amber Sea for all his contributions to the well-being of mankind. Rest in Peace and have "Viegļas Smiltis" as they say in Latvian.

*Skaidrite Rita Sparks, Royal Oak*

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**Skaidrite Rita Sparks** - January 02, 2018 at 06:49 PM

TF

“ Dr. Vee took great care of my mother in law. She too was a survivor of the holocaust and also from Lithuania. They had that in common and it brought her great comfort to know that. He was such a kind and gentle soul. A brilliant modest man. I've never met anyone quite like him before. I cannot express how grateful I feel to have known Dr. Vee. G-d please welcome this worthy soul in your arms and let him rest in peace. Amen 🙏

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**Terri Finefter** - January 02, 2018 at 03:22 PM

MD

“ Dr. Vee was a giant of a man and a physician and teacher. Those of us who were fortunate to have served under his direction as a Fellow in oncology (Fellow 1968-70) were indeed learning how to be a true doctor and how to truly care for others with compassion and empathy for their needs. Dr. Vee was a friend to all those he cared for and their families. Throughout my entire medical career and still today, I find myself using what he taught by example of phrases and actions to explain and to comfort others. He was a mentor in how to treat others and how to live life and what we all should strive to achieve in service to others. We are all better for having known Vee.  
Michael I. Opiari DO

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**Michael Opiari DO** - January 02, 2018 at 09:32 AM

GM

“ Dr. V was my mother's doctor during her final illness. I cannot say enough about how he treated her with such grace, dignity and respect. He allowed her to manager the course of her treatment on her own terms which meant a lot to her and our family.  
Rest in with the Lord, Dr. V. You are one in a million.  
G. C. McNeal

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**Gwendolyn McNeal** - January 01, 2018 at 03:55 PM

PA

“ I cannot add to the sentiments already expressed regarding Dr. Vee’s remarkable professional achievements and his caring qualities as a physician. A few unrelated observations: He could have been the *Dos Equis*’ “The Most Interesting Man in the World.” He had the demeanor of a courtly/cultivated European gentleman/scholar and, aside from medicine, was interested in nature, classical music, horticulture, ornithology, philately, and vintage children’s fairy tales. Well-versed in history, political science, and psychology, he also had a surprisingly keen wit, once replying to the comment, “When pigs fly”, with the rejoinder, “What, you never heard of *Pigasus* [sic]?”

Concerned for the less fortunate, he frequently volunteered at a church-sponsored homeless shelter, and engaged in numerous other acts of charity and kindness. He often remarked that we should always try to be “on the side of the angels.”

Certainly there must be a new constellation in the sky tonight.

*Patricia Arlauskas, former staff member*

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**Patricia Arlauskas** - January 01, 2018 at 12:10 AM

PA

“ Patricia Arlauskas purchased the *Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum* for the family of Vainutis Kazys Vaitkevicius.



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**Patricia Arlauskas** - December 31, 2017 at 08:46 PM

DP

“ *David L. Proulx lit a candle in memory of Vainutis Kazys Vaitkevicius*



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**David L. Proulx** - December 31, 2017 at 07:09 PM



“ *My heartfelt sympathy to his children and his professional associates. He was a giant in compassion and care. I urged him to write his memoirs and now other writers will have to write his remarkable story. His Lithuanian classmates include the past president of Lithuania Valdas Adamkus also 90 years old, many professors and engineers. Sudiev!*



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**Saulius Simoliunas** - December 31, 2017 at 01:03 PM

MK

“ *Dear Vaitkevicius Family*

*I worked with Dr. Vee for a number of years as an administrator in the WSU Internal Medicine education program. As many have already said, he was a gifted teacher, clinician and administrator, but also a gifted human being. He shared his empathy and compassion with many around him. I am certain he will be missed by many people.*

*I am sorry for your loss.*

*Marlene Klann, LPC, NCC*

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**Marlene Klann** - December 30, 2017 at 04:58 PM

“ Dear Vaitkevicius Family,

*Dr. V took care of my husband, Robert S. Gold, from 12/09/1994 until a few weeks ago in his capacity of an oncologist and through the years as a sincere and dedicated friend. Dr. V knew the ART OF DOCTORING, the ART OF MEDICINE, and with glances, smiles, piercing gazes and clear indicators talked about a patient's medical and human status, combining the two into a treatment plan for "living" which included calculations about dying.*

*Dr. V knew what HE wanted, and presented others with the same certain frame-of-mind to guide a family during illness and seek life, the quality of life.*

*Dr. V was a sincere, competent, long-gazing powerhouse of a human being who took on assaults to the body as he had taken them himself - he fought off hatred in Europe and antipathy and found love and caring.*

*Dr. V gave me the certainty of honesty and forthrightness so I could gauge what to do and create a warrior-like mentality of my own - "You said 2% chance of survival? No way, let's go, let's live". He pulled no punches.*

*Dr V, you are our inspiration and the best medicine, along with Dr. Donald Weaver's delicate, expert, and thorough touch in surgery. From you we derive inner strength and the unswerving knowledge that to live has little room for hedging, for doubt, for waffling.*

*With Dr. V's help, I feel we almost literally "threw" Robert in the hospital and Dr. Ehrenpreis relieved Robert's bile duct from the pancreatic tumor's pressure on it that was our alert and symptom of jaundice.*

*Dr. V then treated my beloved father, Leon Anixt and endearing Aunt Jeannette Tilchin. He offered specific words of wisdom to each to enjoy the last days and he visited Aunt Jen at our Aunt Lillian Gold's home as she lay dying. An angel was present.*

*Make no mistake, it was Dr. V's certainty that Karmanos (Wertz) Cancer Institute/Harper Hospital admission was crucial and to be immediate saved Robert's life. To act, this is certainly a dominant aspect of who Dr. V is and how he survived with intelligence,*

*mastery, a big heart, and balanced hate with love.  
May your life, Dr. V, reign in glory and guide us on our way. We say  
AMEN.  
With Pride, Love, Honor, and Your Life as a Testimony to Living, I  
send you to the heavens,  
Rochelle Anixt Gold*

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**Rochelle Anixt Gold** - December 30, 2017 at 03:18 PM

JD

“*Dr. V was a gentle, kind, and caring man. A brilliant teacher, clinician and mentor for so many people that he came in contact with in any capacity at WSU. To be one of his students, residents or colleagues was a joy. I will always remember his smile, wisdom, calm manner and sense of humor. He helped so many people. His legacy in my mind is one of being the ultimate, knowledgeable, caring physician and master teacher. Memories of him are innumerable. Appreciation for his presence in my life is heartfelt. I feel personally fortunate and blessed to have known him. My sincere condolences to Peter and the entire family. Dr. James Clinton*

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**James Clinton DO** - December 30, 2017 at 01:18 PM

RG

“ When I had just turned 51 years old, I was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in December, 1994 and was referred to Dr. V. by Dr. Gordon Moss. Within the next 10 days I underwent the Whipple Surgery by Dr. Weaver. Dr. V. handled my case over the next 5 years at the end of which he told me that I never will have to worry about dying from pancreatic cancer. During those 5 years he not only was my chief doctor, but he became one of my dearest friends. We had one other thing that bound us together for the rest of his life and that was our mutual love for classical music. We met many times at Detroit Symphony Orchestra concerts and had wonderful conversations about them and classical music in general. He invited me to his home on several occasions as well. We had many wonderful conversations about history and politics up until very recently. He will be remembered by me as my greatest hero. I will miss him dearly. Sincerely, Robert Gold, Attorney At Law

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**Robert Gold** - December 30, 2017 at 11:52 AM

DL

“ *Dr. V was a great clinician, teacher and human being. I was fortunate to spend time on his service as a medical student.*

*He taught me the art of medicine--to make time for your patients, to sit at the bedside, to never be rushed with patients. He had an amazing bedside manner and taught me how to talk to tell people they had cancer and make them feel better. He was the master.*

*And he was so supportive to me personally. When I faced challenges as an intern he bent over backwards to help me.*

*Dr. V was always there too--early in the morning, late at night. He was there--for his patients, his trainees, his colleagues. He was the role model for all.*

*He will be deeply missed. His memory is a blessing for all.*

*Diane Levine MD*

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**Diane Levine** - December 29, 2017 at 12:17 PM

SF

“ *Dr. Vaitkevicius, the skilled and compassionate man, helped insure my Mother was able to enjoy a lengthy remission after having been diagnosed with Stage IV breast cancer...the four years she received made it possible for her to attend the weddings of her children and the birth of a cherished grand-daughter.*

*Me and my brothers and sisters will always be grateful to him for what he did for our Mother!*

*Rest in peace, Dr. Vee...HEARTFELT condolences to my Friends, Walter and Marty, and all the other Vaitkevicius survivors!*

*Respectfully,*

*Steven J. Figiel*

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**Steven Figiel** - December 29, 2017 at 10:45 AM

JM

“ *Dr Vee created the position for an academic cancer pathologist that I filled in 1981. It was always such a pleasure to work with the teams of oncologists that Dr. V developed. It was a rewarding to discuss issues with Dr. Vee and to seek his advice when I needed help in supporting the clinical cancer effort. He was an insightful compassionate clinician and fair, supportive administrator. I always loved my interactions with him.*

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**John Crissman MD** - December 29, 2017 at 10:29 AM



“ *Full Of Love Bouquet was purchased for the family of Vainutis Kazys Vaitkevicius.*



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December 28, 2017 at 06:54 PM



“ *KCI Epidemiology Research purchased the Emerald Garden Basket for the family of Vainutis Kazys Vaitkevicius.*



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**KCI Epidemiology Research** - December 28, 2017 at 01:41 PM



“ *The greatest man I have ever known died yesterday.*

*He was an angel on earth – a mentor and a friend.*

*A survivor of a Nazi concentration camp. Grandfather of oncology in Detroit. Cured the incurable.*

*I think about him often...nearly every day, in fact. Such was the man he was.*

*I'd like to think I'm a little better because of him...the way I live my life...the way I treat people.*

*Wish you could've known him.*

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**Joe Michaels** - December 28, 2017 at 12:50 PM

LD

*I worked with and for Dr. Vee for 40 years. I never saw him lose his temper or raise his voice. He was kind to us all. His patients always came first, as it should be, and those of us privileged to work with him learned so much about caring and respect for those we took care of. I will miss him. Linda Davis*

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**Linda Davis** - December 29, 2017 at 09:15 AM

SU

*Thank you, Joe, for your praise of Dr. Vee. What a privilege it was to work with his team. Susan Urban*

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**Susan H Urban** - January 01, 2018 at 02:57 PM

JM

“*Dr. Vee was an important part of my life from my second year at WSU Medical School. He was my Doctor when I developed cancer in my last year of Medical School, my mentor and friend through internship, residency and fellowship in Medical Oncology. He was the reason I became a cancer Doctor. I was asked to join him when I became a faculty member in his new role as Chairman of the Department of Internal Medicine at WSU Medical School. He was instrumental in helping my obtain my first basic science grant which launched a 20 year period of NIH funding. He was a true "giant", bigger than life and impossible to imitate and the ultimate role model. So much so that I can not imagine him ever not being with us*

*My heartfelt condolences to Peter , who I know, and the rest of Dr. Vee's family.*

*John F. Ensley, M.D..  
Emeritus Professor of Oncology  
Karmanos Cancer center*

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**John F. Ensley M.D.** - December 28, 2017 at 11:54 AM



“ *Beautiful Heart Bouquet was purchased for the family of Vainutis Kazys Vaitkevicius.*



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December 28, 2017 at 11:52 AM