



## Matti Kosonen

April 16, 1936 - May 31, 2025

Captain Matti S. Kosonen, 89, of Darien, CT, took his last flight to heaven on the morning of Saturday, May 31, 2025 in the company of his wife, Jane Licek Kosonen, in the comfort of their home. Matti is survived by his wife Janie, his daughter, Christine Kosonen, step-daughters, Jan Marie Tarzia and Ashleigh Miller (Evan) and beloved granddaughters, Raya Codrescu and Juliana, Melina and Sophia Tarzia.

Matti was born in Parikkala, Finland, in the province of Karelia, on April 16, 1936 to Väinö & Hilda Kosonen. Growing up in World War II era Finland, Matti was instilled with a strong work ethic and sense of determination. A testament to his strong belief in the importance of education, Matti became the only of his 15 siblings to attend and graduate high school. After finishing high school, Matti began his study of flight in 1954 at the Kauhava Air Force Academy, becoming a Gnat pilot, Lieutenant in the Finnish army and one of the first Finnish jet pilots. In 1960, aiming to reach greater heights, Matti emigrated to America, sailing into New York City on the Cunard Queen Mary, on Thanksgiving Day with only a suitcase, pocket-watch and \$100. While in New York Matti was accepted into the U.S. Air Force's Avionics course, where he graduated top of his class. In 1964, with tensions in Vietnam reaching a boiling point for the U.S., Matti began studying the flight of helicopters, once more graduating top of his class and earning the chance to further train in the piloting of the Boeing CH-47 'Chinook' helicopter. Matti departed from San

Francisco for Vietnam on October 18, 1965, and would go on to serve two tours in the Vietnam War as a Chinook pilot. On November 11, 1965, Matti was shot down as he was traveling back to base. Never one to give up, he quickly resumed his position. Exactly one year later, on the same day- November 11, 1966 - Matti was once again shot down- this time while carrying supplies. For his bravery in battle, he became a decorated soldier in the U.S. Military.

After his time in Vietnam, Matti returned to New York. Forever drawn to the skies, he would make piloting his career. First piloting helicopter sight-seeing tours over New York City and then flying planes privately for the Rayette-Faberge company and actor Cary Grant. In 1969, Matti finally achieved what had always been his greatest dream, when he received an offer from United Airlines to become a commercial airplane pilot. Matti would go on to pilot planes for United Airlines for over 30 years, logging thousands of hours in the skies, and eventually earning the title of Captain. Matti treasured his time with United Airlines and would often speak of the many wonderful people he had the pleasure of flying with. Matti met Janie in 1990. The pair married in 1997 and remained dedicated partners and 'Co-pilots' throughout their 27 years of marriage.

Following his retirement from United Airlines in 1996 Matti would frequently return to his home-village of Parikkala in Finland. In 1998 he bought an old military border guard station, which he renovated and turned into The Hotelli Laatokan Portti; a thriving business that he ran for 11 years. In his later years, Matti was frequently invited to Roxbury Elementary in Stamford, CT, as an honored guest at their Veterans Day celebration, where he would regale the students with stories of his time in Vietnam. Matti was a dedicated friend, loving father and uncle, making daily skype calls to family members and friends in Finland, and to his daughter and granddaughter in Oregon.

Like a true Finn, Matti could usually be found enjoying his sauna at home. He loved to tell incredible stories about his life to his friends, family and strangers alike. With a large personality and strong spirit, Matti added life to every room that he was in and will truly be missed by all who knew him.

If you wish to make an online remembrance for the family, you may sign the family guestbook at [www.bosakfuneralhome.com](http://www.bosakfuneralhome.com) or [www.facebook.com/bosakfuneralhome](http://www.facebook.com/bosakfuneralhome).

# Tribute Wall

MD

“ I joined United in 1989 and flew as Matti's First Officer many times. He was quite a character and always fun to be around. After reading the article in the Retired United Pilot magazine I was amazed to find the many Matti exploits that I was completely unaware of. He was a fine man, a fine friend, and a fine aviator. God Speed Matti.....  
Mike DeSantis

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**Mike DeSantis** - September 13, 2025 at 12:39 PM

AS

“ I'm so sorry to learn of Matti's passing and am amazed to read about his life stories. My husband and I met Matti when we flew on a United Airlines flight that he piloted. When he greeted passengers on the microphone, we looked at each other and said together "he's Finnish." That was confirmed when we greeted him before exiting the plane. We chatted about our Finnish American Heritage Society in Canterbury, CT, which he later joined and remained a member. He told me about Laatokan Portti since I take tour groups to Finland, but unfortunately we never had the opportunity to visit there. Matti was a true Finn and an American hero, and I'm glad to have made his acquaintance. Blessings to the family.

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**Anita Smiley** - June 28, 2025 at 01:25 PM