

# Rocky Danner:

Master Judge, BBQ Organizer, Friend  
1938-2019



## **Dated June 16, 2009: Rocky wrote his own biography for an article and he shares his extraordinary story about the world of BBQ.**

*"I started my barbecue "career" at the age of 5 or 6 by assisting my grandfather. We cooked whole hogs on cement blocks and a fence gate. We cooked six or eight whole hogs each year, mostly during the holidays or other special occasions.*

*As I grew older, I continued to cook and entered a few local BBQ contests. But my work demanded too much of my time to cook contests regularly. Instead, I assisted different BBQ teams, took photos, and wrote stories about the events & winners. This led to my becoming a staff writer for the National Barbecue News.*

*When I began judging BBQ contests, there were no special judging classes that had to be taken. If a competition did not have enough judges, the organizers would send someone out to find a judge from the cooking area or just chose a cooker which was not helping a team.*

*Later on, I took the (MIM) Memphis In May and the (KCBS) Kansas City Barbecue Society judging classes. I have since taken the (WBQA) World Barbecue Association judging class and the (JBS) Jamaican Barbecue Society judging class. Currently, I am an official Master Judge in all of these barbecue associations.*

*I am the past Vice-President and working member of the (WBQA) World Barbecue Association. This organization is based in Switzerland and encompasses the European continent. I now work as a World Barbecue Organizer & Consultant. In the past nine years, I*

*have traveled to several countries, assisting them in judging or starting new barbecue contests.*

*I organized a barbecue contest in Montego Bay, Jamaica, where I wrote all the rules for both the cooks and the judges. I taught the new cooks & judges the regulations to introduce them to their responsibilities, which produced a fair BBQ contest along with fun for everyone. The Jamaican event lasted five years until Hurricane "Ivan" blew the resort and my competition out to sea.*

*My first love is starting Back Yard contests and Children's 'Q. I will run five back yard contests and four children's Q events this year. I enjoy the spirit of the Back Yard cooks who are learning first hand how to compete. I also enjoy working with the children in their BBQ competitions as they are learning as well.*

*In my spare time, I test BBQ cookers from various manufacturers. I write a critique on these products (whether the grill or pit is good, bad, or ugly). I recommend changes in the design or operation of the units and suggest changes I feel are necessary to improve the grills or pits. After the testing, I also write an article about the performance of the cookers in the National Barbecue News.*

*I am proud to list another accomplishment of being selected as one of the three Master Judges for the BBQ ALL-STARS Television series Production".*

Rocky Danner, never met a stranger, and if he was your friend, he was a friend for life. If you weren't his friend, you stayed clear from him...plain and simple, but true. He was a fair man, always believing in a level, equal playing field for all the BBQ competitors. He told you like it was, like it or not. If a cooker asked him about their contest entries, he would give them advice, good or bad, but in an encouraging, patient nature.

The BBQ world changed because of his truthfulness and ethics. And if you read his articles in the National Barbecue News, he never failed to thank everyone involved. That's the way he was, grateful for attending the contests and appreciative to everyone helping to make the contests so successful.

Rocky had many stories to tell. Most times, in his National Barbecue News articles, he spoke his mind if something wasn't right at a contest. One example was at a Kids' Q contest. He caught a proud dad bringing in a nice pack of chicken thighs for his kids to use to compete versus the thighs that were given out from the contest. Rocky had to disqualify the children from competing. He told the kids, "Ask your dad why you were disqualified." Not an insult to the children, but he surely wanted those kids to know the truth from their own father about fair competition.

Another time, he told a mother that he was going to put her "in the sandbox" if she continued to help her child cook in the Kids' Q. On another occasion, a cooker complained that the next-door cooker wouldn't share the water supply. He told the non-compliant participant to get a splitter so his neighboring cook could use the water, or leave the event. That settled the situation. He had so many stories to tell and each one with his own perspective. He loved to test BBQ equipment and offered the makers sound instructions, good or bad, on how to improve their products.

Rocky loved to travel and visited 28 countries. There were also uncountable American BBQ events he attended during his time here on earth. He was an explorer and took in all the different sites and cuisines from every country. His camera stayed busy with fascinating pictures of the scenery, landmarks, people, and

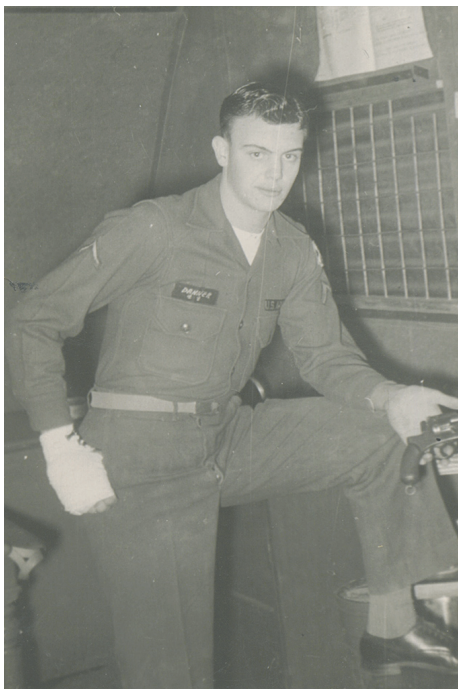
food at every visit. Along with his photographs were tales about the people he met and the exotic foods he ate. When he spoke or wrote about them, it was as if you were strolling along with him, witnessing it all. He loved history, and his photos revealed that history, along with countless memories.

Rocky was an ambassador and mentor at the annual Jack Daniel's World Championship Barbecue Competition. He was always helping the international teams get cookers or supplies that couldn't be carried on an airplane during visits to the USA. He made thousands of friends on the BBQ circuit, never forgetting their name, never forgetting their region, or customs. He was interviewed on TV in Great Britain and Norway as well as radio programs while sharing his remarkable BBQ techniques.

He also had countless stories about his international travels. One of his favorite stories is when he and Chef Jeremy Fowler of Great Britain were leaving Estonia. Their luggage was sent to Russia instead of their location in Estonia. Rocky lost his temper about the luggage and Chef Jeremy had to hold him back by the shirttail as the Estonia police had drawn their guns at Rocky. "Where is my luggage with all my equipment?" Rocky asked the airline. Their reply, "the Rooskies have it and nothing ever comes back." So Russia gained his luggage, full of camera equipment and other personal belongings that Rocky never got back.

Rocky was also an adventurer. In South Africa, he rode an ostrich 3.8 seconds. He also hunted and killed an eland in South Africa, a prized trophy he had mounted and displayed it proudly inside his home. He quickly became friends with the Zulu Chief and tribe. He thrived to become friends with everyone he met and respected their customs and traditions.

His passion was grilling and smoking at his Tennessee mountain home for his family and friends. His grill would "scream" at 600°. His steaks were the size of a hubcap. His pork chops were always 1.5 inches thick. Frying fish or shrimp was another specialty of his. He enjoyed showing his international friends how it was done. Even after all of this, Rocky was his own worst critic... from



better seasoning, a hotter fire, or overcooking things.

Rocky was born and raised in a small farm town, Plainville, Indiana. Growing up, he worked a lot in the fields by gathering vegetables. Someone asked, "Why he joined the Army at 15, Rocky answered in a way that only he could. "I was tired of looking at a mule's rear end!" He was ready to get out of that small town and begin a new life of his own, so somehow he enlisted. When he was 16, he was on a boat headed to Korea. Later on, Rocky was a supervisor at Inland Steel in Chicago for 33 ½ years. Afterward, he retired to Tennessee, building his mountain home.

Rocky was also an avid hunter and an excellent marksman. He competed in shotgun, pistol and rifle competitions. He always enjoyed fishing with friends and family, from Louisiana to Canada. He was a 32nd degree Mason. He loved the farm life and cranking up the old 8N Ford to bush-hog a field or using a chainsaw to cut firewood.

Rocky was well-versed in writing articles and loved to read. He loved our God. God, who created heavens and earth along with all the wonders of nature for our enjoyment. He was not one who pushed his religious beliefs at the dinner table but silently prayed.

Rocky passed away at home, surrounded by his family and his best friend, Danny Montgomery. He was a strong-willed man, who discovered he had lung cancer through an ultrasound on his carotid

artery in September 2017. He endured more than most people....with radiation, lung cancer surgery, Opdivo immunotherapy treatments, and radiation in a span of two years. He was tough, and many times never showed his pain.

Rocky's military funeral was held in Plainville, Indiana, on December 4, 2020. He was buried at Walnut Hill Cemetery in Plainville. His request for memorials to St. Jude's Children's Hospital instead of flowers showed exactly what kind of heart he had inside as he was always helping children. He is survived by three children, Jeff Danner, Jae Danner, and Rhonda Kohman; four grandsons, Christian, Parker, Jacob, and Joshua Danner; two granddaughters, Reese and Ryan Kohman; companion, Judy Flynt.

Gone, but forever in our hearts. We miss you, and we love you, .....the Danner Family.

*"For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16*

