



John Graham

August 11, 2022

A mocha frappe always made the day better. Especially if you were sipping one while taking a drive around town, getting some fresh air and enjoying being out and about. For our dad, John W. Graham, Jr., a gentleman whose cup was always half-full, a “Sunday drive” like this was welcome any day of the week. Oh, how we will miss these drives with him! On August 11, 2022, at age 94, John passed peacefully into eternal glory.

John W. Graham Jr. was born at home on May 1, 1928, in a Carter Oil field town, called “the Camp”, just north of Wilson, Oklahoma. His parents were John W. Graham, Sr. and Beulah Marinda (Kirkpatrick) Graham. John Sr. worked for Carter Oil, and Beulah was a homemaker. Their family grew, and John Jr. was soon joined by a younger sister (Margaret Sue) and then 13 years later by “the twins” (brothers Norman Wester and Larry Kirk). Dad loved his parents and three siblings very much. He spoke often of his grandparents, especially on his mother’s side, and their kindness to him while growing up. His paternal aunts Hazel, Elsie, and Anna Mae (Sue) with her husband Norman Wester also played key roles in his life, influencing him for good. Dad was always grateful the Lord blessed him with such a nice family.

In 1946, after graduating from Mt. Vernon Township High School in Mt. Vernon, Illinois, John joined the U.S. Army. He served mostly in Japan. When John returned to the U.S., he attended the University of Illinois at Urbana-

Champaign. The music of the era stole his heart, and during his college years he loved taking rides on the river boats along the Mississippi River for dinner and dancing, while watching Stan Kenton and Jimmy Dorsey perform. He also fondly remembered hearing Nat King Cole sing live (not once, but three times!). After two and a half years at Illinois, he transferred to the University of Tulsa, and graduated on May 26, 1952 with a Bachelor of Science degree in geology.

John began his career working for Carter Oil as a petroleum geologist. In July 1952 the company sent him to northeastern Montana. "Once I got to Montana, I never wanted to leave," he would tell us. In the Fall of 1952, in Poplar, he met Caryl Jean Helmer. One of their first sightings was at a Labor Day party at the State Line Club near Williston, North Dakota. When we asked Dad how soon after they started to date, he answered, "As soon as possible!" A year later, on September 26, 1953, they married in Poplar's Presbyterian Church.

In addition to our mom, Dad loved the land, and he knew many of the backroads of Montana, North Dakota, and Wyoming. His work in the oil and gas business eventually took John and Caryl to live in Miles City, then Minot, followed by four years in the beautiful city of Maceio in Brazil, before returning to Billings in the early 1960s to work as an independent geologist, and to start a family.

John and Caryl raised their girls, Anna Louise and Lisa Marguerite, in a truly happy home. A devastating blow to John was the death of Caryl in 1995 from ovarian cancer, when she was just 65 and he 67. Dad always appreciated companionship, and over the years enjoyed the company of Barb Rigg-Olson and Sarah Repka.

After retiring, John volunteered at Billings Deaconess Hospital as a van driver. He and his long-time friend, Durwood Johnson, volunteered together for the

Billings Chamber of Commerce. Dad loved maps and sharing his knowledge about his beloved state of Montana with travelers who were passing through the Magic City.

John was a member of St. Stephens' Episcopal Church in Billings for many years, and later cherished Bible studies at Emmanuel Baptist Church, and the Sunday services held at Westpark Village, his home for the last 8 years. Although his eyesight diminished, he was a life-long learner and continued to listen to books on tape and to grow in his faith. Dad believed the true and timeless Gospel message, that Jesus Christ is the living Son of God who came into the world to save him, a sinner and to grant him eternal life. The prayers of his final days often focused on the reality of future joy with Jesus and other family and friends.

On August 2, John and his daughters agreed it would be best if he moved closer to family, and he moved to MorningStar Assisted Living in Fort Collins, Colorado. MorningStar is truly a lovely community, and this is where John died of natural causes, with his daughters at his side.

We learned so many things from our dad and especially appreciate how he influenced our lives with his optimism, honesty, and kindness. He was a great model of someone who took genuine interest in other people. Dad was patriotic and deeply loved this country. "While it isn't perfect, the U.S.A. is the best country in the world for all the freedom and opportunity it provides," he would say. One of the traditions at Westpark Village was wearing a red shirt on Fridays, to honor the men and women who serve and sacrifice for this country. On Thursdays, he would remind us, "Tomorrow is Red Shirt Day!"

John is survived by his daughter Anna Graham and her husband Eric Lindeen of Omaha, Nebraska; daughter Lisa Leachman and her husband Lee

Leachman of Fort Collins, Colorado; his grandson Graham Leachman and his wife Jenn Leachman of Fort Collins, Colorado; 12 nieces and nephews; 3 cousins; and several dear in-laws. John had a deep friendship with his grandson, Graham; he greatly admired Graham's faith and truly appreciated the sincere interest he took in his grandfather's life, which included frequent calls and visits.

Funeral arrangements are being handled by Goes Funeral Care of Fort Collins (www.goesfuneralcare.com). A graveside service will be held on Friday, October 14, at 2 pm, at Yellowstone National Cemetery (55 Buffalo Trail Road, Laurel, Montana), about 1 mile north of town. A reception in Billings will follow.

John's family looks forward to the time when we will see him again in heaven! We will be forever grateful to this dear man who gave us endless love, wisdom, and encouragement.

Tribute Wall



“ *John Graham*

October 25, 2022 at 06:14 PM



“ *My family has very fond memories of John. He attended many of our childrens' sporting events and weddings as well as holiday celebrations and various meals. He was always such a kind man and a true gentleman with a delightful sense of humor. John made a difference and touched many lives. His was definitely a life well lived.*

Dave and Nancy Rigg

Dave & Nancy Rigg - August 21, 2022 at 01:32 PM



*Dear Nancy and Dave -
Thank you for your kind words. Our dad sure loved all of you! And he truly cherished the time with your family. Hugs to all of you.*

Anna Graham - August 23, 2022 at 09:28 AM



“ *We are honored to have been a part of John's life for the past 7 years. He treated my mom so well and made her very happy. We enjoyed taking them out to dinner twice a month and he was so happy to have food other than Westparks menu! He is truly missed!
Sincerely, Cary and Kevin Roberts*

Cary Roberts - August 21, 2022 at 10:12 AM

AG

Dear Cary,

We are grateful for the joy and companionship Dad had with your mother. He so enjoyed being included in your family events over the years... and he was mighty impressed with all your beautiful dogs! We too, already miss him like crazy. Hugs to you.

Anna Graham - August 23, 2022 at 09:40 AM