

## **John Thomas Rifenbark, Jr.**

John Thomas Rifenbark, Jr., 75, of Paris, Virginia, died January 6, 2023, at Sunrise Senior Living at Hunter Mill, Oakton, Virginia, with his wife and sons at his side. John was born November 25, 1947, in Kansas City, Missouri, to John Thomas Rifenbark, Sr., and Elsa Catherine Carlson. He received a bachelor's degree in Spanish, with a minor in chemistry, from the University of Missouri–Kansas City in 1969; and a master's degree in entomology from the University of Missouri–Columbia in 1979.

From 1973 through 1975, John worked as a rice volunteer in the Peace Corps/Dominican Republic. He joined the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in 1980, and served as a foreign service officer in Bolivia, North Yemen, Egypt, Bangladesh, and USAID/Washington; he retired in 2011. In his early adulthood, he worked as a bench chemist, teamster, postal clerk, bartender, and dairy laboratory technician. In his forties, he became a windshield farmer of corn and beans, sharecropping with his dear friend in Western Missouri.

John was an adventurous man, with many interests, talents, and skills; he had a keen curiosity in the natural world and was happiest outdoors. He was introduced to international travel in high school as an American Field Service student in San Sebastian, Spain. Travel continued as a passion, as did foreign languages and cultures, music, dogs, and birds. He was an accomplished motorcyclist, scuba diver, photographer, gardener, beer meister, beekeeper, mountaineer, and grill master. In 1979, John completed the 4,250-mile Bikecentennial route on his Austro-Daimler, from Astoria, Oregon, to Yorktown, Virginia. He continued to bicycle at all his overseas postings and in Virginia.

Following his father's example, John dedicated much time to Boy Scout leadership in foreign posts and at home. In addition to scouting, he tutored his boys in bicycling, scuba diving, grilling, and beermaking. He enjoyed summer concerts at the Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts, where he volunteered for many years as an usher at the Filene Center, and winter sledding with his boys. He loved hiking with his dogs in every season.

John died of pancreatic cancer and pneumonia 4 weeks after the cancer diagnosis; he had lived with Parkinson's disease and its complications for nearly 20 years. The final 4 years of his life were spent in nursing facilities in Virginia and Alabama. Survivors include his wife of 41 years, Elmira Olivia (Polly) Gilbert; son William Gilbert Rifenbark, daughter-in-law Kathryn, and grandson Benjamin; son Graham Gilbert Rifenbark, his partner Allison Lombardi, and her children, Frank and Irie; brother James Hugo Rifenbark, sister-in-law Deborah, and niece Kelly Soucy and her family; sister-in-law Julie Cotney, brother-in-law Ronald Cotney, and nephews Justin Cotney and Matthew Cotney and their families; and dear cousin Marcia Spaulding Larson. He was preceded in death by his parents.

A memorial service will be held at noon on Friday, February 24, at Vienna Presbyterian Church, 124 Park Street NE, Vienna, Virginia. The family will welcome guests at 11:00 a.m. Condolences may be sent to the family at 344 Maple Avenue West #327, Vienna, VA 22180. Contributions in John's memory may be made to The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research, P.O. Box 5014, Hagerstown, MD 21741-5014; or The Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 59 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, NY 14850-1999.