

John Rigby Obituary



Longtime Washingtonian John Thomas Rigby passed away peacefully January 2 at the age of 90. John died in Maryland at Collington, a retirement community where he had moved in 2024.

John was born and raised in Richmond, VA, the youngest of three sons of Christopher and Gladys Rigby. He attended Georgetown University, earning a BA in English and a JD in law. John met Anne Curtis in Grand Isle, La., in 1956 and they were married in 1959. John joined the law firm of Arnold, Fortas, and Porter in 1961. He was active in the firm's civil rights involvement and was the first head of its pro bono

publico program. In 1976, John became the executive director of International Voluntary Services, a Washington-based volunteer organization and a precursor to the Peace Corps. During John's tenure he transformed IVS into a truly global organization by ensuring its volunteers were placed into community development programs managed by local non-profits. John's core belief in the strength of local communities guided his work for the next 44 years.

John's life was dedicated to promoting democracy and governance in developing nations. His leadership spanned prestigious international non-profits, including the International Institute for Rural Reconstruction (IIRR), where he served as president and CEO, and PACT, Inc., where he was first a board member and then country director in Zimbabwe. He also served the U.S. government as a senior transition advisor in the Office of Transition Initiatives at USAID. He retired in 2020 at the age of 84.

(NOTE: One of his USAID colleagues says: "He was chief of party in OTI/Zimbabwe back in the day. After that he was in the OTI bullpen for many years as a Sr. transition advisor...he was a revered mentor to many program staff both in the field and in Washington.")

John often worked in the world's most difficult and dangerous post-conflict zones, working to bridge the gap between immediate relief and sustainable development. He was a fixture in post-conflict zones even into his 80s and a mentor to many. His enthusiasm remained undimmed and he found profound hope in the resilience of the communities he served. Over the course of his personal and professional travels, he visited more than 70 countries and territories covering six continents, as well as 49 states.

John enjoyed his life abroad and at home. He loved books, music, bird watching and the outdoors. John loved family and neighborhood gatherings, playing his guitar and leading singalongs. He and his dog Boudreaux were a familiar sight together. He maintained well into his later years that he still didn't know what he wanted to be when he grew up.

John was preceded in death by his parents and brothers Bob and Chris Rigby. He is survived by his wife of 66 years, Anne, and his children Julie, Leslie, Jeff, Crispin and Sam. He was

also the beloved "Bon Papa" to his six grandchildren, Malcolm, Finn, Curtis, Charlie, Vaughan and Anna. A celebration of life will be held this spring in Washington, D.C.

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