

Jack Vanderryn Obituary

Jack Vanderryn passed away peacefully, surrounded by his family, on April 17, 2026, three days after his 96th birthday.



Jack was born in Groningen, the Netherlands, on April 14th, 1930. His family fled the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands in 1939 settling first in Kew Gardens, NY and later in Great Neck, Long Island. He went to P.S. 99, he learned to play tennis with his dad and piano, both of which became lifelong hobbies. His interest in science led Jack to brave the long daily subway ride to Brooklyn Technical High School for a more focused high school experience. After high school, Jack attended Lehigh University for both his undergraduate and graduate education, earning a Ph.D. in chemistry in 1955. Jack maintained his connection with Lehigh for the rest of his life.

His first position was teaching chemistry at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute (VPI) in Blacksburg, VA. During a vacation in New York, Jack asked Margrit (Marge) Wolfes to do him a favor and marry him; they were wed in March of 1956. The couple set up housekeeping in Blacksburg and started their family with the birth of David.

Dr. Vanderryn had been teaching for two years when a guest lecturer he was giving a ride to, offered him a job at the Atomic Energy Commission in Oak Ridge, TN, where Judith was born. That initial position began Jack's long career of government service in several federal agencies. After two years in Tennessee, an opportunity arose to work for the AEC in the Washington, DC area and they moved their family to Garrett Park, MD. There they started to indulge in their shared interests in art and music, frequently attending theater, concerts, and art shows.

In 1967, Jack was asked to serve as the Senior Scientific Advisor to the U.S. Mission to the International Atomic Energy Agency. The family - now four children, David, Judith, Amy, and Danny (often said all in one all-purpose breath) - moved to Vienna, Austria. Jack was responsible for providing technical information to U.S. diplomats negotiating international nuclear nonproliferation treaties. During this four-year period, Jack and Marge took enthusiastic advantage of music, art, social offerings, and - to the eternal consternation of

their children - antique stores. They also travelled extensively, together and individually, and Jack made connections with art dealers in almost every place they visited. His favorite place was Paris.

The family returned to the US in 1971, moving to Bethesda MD. Jack continued in his government service in a variety of senior positions with the U.S. Department of Energy and the U.S. Agency for International Development. He broadened the focus of his national and international work including projects to enhance environmental management and biodiversity, support for renewable energy projects, and collaborating with nations to build organizational capacity.

When Dr. Vanderryn retired from government service in 1991, he found new joy as Program Director for Environment at the Moriah Fund, a family foundation based in Bethesda. At Moriah, Jack had free rein to focus on making significant grants to groups working on pollution prevention, renewable energy, and biodiversity both in the US and in developing countries. He was also a board member of five different nonprofit organizations working to increase the capacity of indigenous organizations to protect biodiversity, gain land rights, and promote conservation and renewable energy. Throughout Jack's career, but particularly at Moriah, he was excited by mentoring others, learning from his talented and dedicated co-workers, and inspired by the potential to benefit others.

Jack inherited a horror of sitting still from his Dutch family, and a tradition for being of service from his Jewish heritage. Moreover, he had a number of other interests outside of his work. He was a lifelong collector of fine prints; although he had no formal training in art or art history, he did what he always did - followed his interests. One of his first prints was acquired from M.C. Escher, whom his mother visited on one of her trips to the Netherlands with instructions from Jack to buy "something" (he gave her \$100 for the purchase). All through their days together, Marge remembers receiving large packages containing prints from all over the globe; the rewards of having made all those connections in his travels! He matted and framed his prints himself. Anyone visiting the Vanderryn home noted the prints displayed on every available wall space, and his family continually debated their favorites. Often though, when his family asked him what he saw in each print or to identify his favorites, he would shrug, stating that he just had "a feel" for it.

He shared his love and knowledge with others, attending print fairs and outdoor art fairs both as a buyer and a seller, where Marge had fun helping to staff their "Jack Vanderryn, Fine Arts" booth. He and Marge hosted several of their own shows, including Marge's collection of Southwestern Native American pottery. Jack served as the president of the

Washington Print Club from 1986 to 1990. In his retirement, he also volunteered at several galleries in the San Francisco area, assisting in cataloguing their collections. He was a generous patron of the arts; donations from his collection are housed at the National Gallery of Art, The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, and at Lehigh University.

The couple moved to San Carlos, CA to be near Danny and his family in 2007. He played tennis for much of his life; while in San Carlos, Jack joined a tennis group that became an important part of his social life. He organized mixed doubles play and played almost daily until the age of 89. He also enjoyed playing the piano, even building himself a harpsichord. Jack and Margrit's home was always filled with music, whether the selection was from chamber music or Tom Lehrer. He enjoyed crafts, woodworking and building, teaching himself how to bend plexiglass to create coffee tables. Jack wishfully said that he would have chosen to be a woodworker if he could remake his career choice.

Jack and Marge moved back to Bethesda in 2019, to be closer to family who had migrated to the East Coast. Their daughter Amy became a fixture at Fox Hill Senior Residences, where the couple landed. Other family members visited regularly, enjoying the Sunday brunches, where Jack inevitably ordered two pieces of French toast, double maple syrup, but no powdered sugar topping.

Jack was proud to bear the Vanderryn name (simplified from the original "van der Rijn" on the family's arrival in the U.S.). In 1981, his mother created a reunion of the entire family - nicknamed "the Van Clan" - and Jack enthusiastically stepped into the role of organizer and patriarch for the group that now numbers around 70 members. He was always interested in his children's and grandchildren's lives, and was generous with his time and resources to support them, whether he understood their wilder adventures and interests or not. We will remember how his face would light up when we came into his home, and his eagerness to hear what we were up to. Jack was also well known in his family for his stubbornness, which he would claim with pride and a gleam - like a challenge - in his eye. When he was admitted to hospice, the managing nurse noted repeatedly how much of a fighter he was; his family shared their knowing laughter. Jack hung tenaciously on to life until his entire family was in the room - and then quietly took his final breath.

Jack is survived by Margrit, his wife of 70 years, his sisters Frederika and Heleen, two daughters Amy and Judith, his children-in-law David Marvin and Winnie van der Rijn, and his grandchildren Ben (Lili), Seth, Maddy, and Elijah. He was predeceased by his brother Sim and two sons David and Danny. Services are private.

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