



Capt. James (Jim) Albert Niffenegger, MD

October 28, 2022

Captain James (Jim) Albert Niffenegger, M.D. passed away peacefully in Sarasota, Florida at age 88 on October 28, 2022, surrounded by family. Dr. Niffenegger lived a life of love and service. A brilliant ophthalmologist and surgeon with near-encyclopedic knowledge, he was a pillar of his medical community in Canton, Ohio where he practiced for over 40 years and where he was known for his skills, good humor, kindness, and generosity.

Born in South Haven, Michigan, Jim helped his father at their grocery store, Niffenegger Brothers Handy Market. At the beginning of Freshman year at Northwestern University, he met his future wife, Joyce Ann Urbach, on a blind date. He graduated in 4 years with honors and a Masters in Chemistry. Joyce and Jim married in Canton, Ohio after graduation and Jim worked as a Teamster in Chicago that summer prior to starting Medical School at Northwestern and Joyce started her job as an elementary school teacher. In medical school, Jim and his classmates went to lectures during the day and, at night, they worked in low-income communities assisting pregnant women with childbirth. "Despite the tough conditions, not a single baby or mother was lost during our time in the program" he would proudly recount. After being elected to the Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society and graduating from medical school, Jim completed his internship at Northwestern's Cook County Hospital and continued training in aerospace medicine as a Flight Surgeon at Brooks Airforce Base.

Primarily based at Carswell AFB in Fort Worth, Jim contributed to the study

and testing of the escape capsule developed to protect the flyers of the Strategic Air Command's supersonic B-58 Hustler bomber, allowing the crew to eject safely at twice the speed of sound and from as high as 70,000 feet. Jim further served his country by evaluating the psychological and physical health of pilots and crew aboard B-52 Stratofortress bombers in flights lasting days requiring inflight refueling as part of America's cold-war nuclear deterrence. With typical humility, Jim would down-play the danger and heroics when telling Airforce stories to his kids and grandchildren who listened with rapt attention. It was not until his recent illness that Jim talked about the radiation exposures and revealed he injured his leg ejecting from a jet trainer – technically supporting his claim to Joyce that he “never jumped out of a plane.” Granted a brief leave to interview at Harvard with Dr. David G. Cogan and the faculty of the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary in Boston, Captain Niffenegger was excited to accept Dr. Cogan's offer to join the Ophthalmology residency program after clearing it with a phone call to Joyce. Jim then had to respectfully decline an invitation to stay at the Infirmary for several more days and was unable to reveal, at the time, he was due back at Carswell the next day to examine a B-58 crew after a record setting supersonic flight. Following completion of his military service and training at Harvard, Dr. Niffenegger proceeded to serve his community in Canton, Ohio where he taught medical students as part of the faculty of NEOUCOM and was the President of the Aultman Hospital Medical Staff, President of the Stark County Medical Society and chaired a part of the United Way campaign. Jim was proud to have his son John join his ophthalmology group as a retinal specialist in his final 4 years of practice. After retiring and saying goodbye to Harriet and the many cherished employees and co-workers of the Canton Eye Center/Eye Centers of Ohio, Jim focused on being with his beloved wife Joyce and enjoying sunsets and whales from their home in Maui not far from the home of Joyce's parents Mildred Dole Urbach and Harley John Urbach. After living part-time in Potomac, Maryland to be with his daughter and family, Jim and Joyce later moved from Maui to Sarasota to be closer to his son and family

and still enjoy the warmth and sunshine.

Witty and warm to the end, Jim was always supportive, kind, and loving. In addition to his father John and mother Hildegard, Jim was preceded in death by his brothers Jack and Phillip. He is survived by his devoted wife Joyce, his daughter Catherine Ann Roca, M.D., son-in-law Rigoberto Amado Roca, M.D., grandchildren Alexander James Roca and Lydia Marie Roca and survived by his son John Harley Niffenegger, M.D., daughter-in-law Arysol Niffenegger, M.D., grandchildren James Salvador Niffenegger (who was named after Jim) and Christina Murphy and her husband Nathan.

Captain James Albert Niffenegger, M.D. will be honored with a military funeral at the Sarasota National Cemetery. In lieu of flowers, the family requests a donation to the American Cancer Society.