

John William Heyde

Died: June 3, 2009

Jack died of mesothelioma, a rare and particularly malignant form of cancer, at age 70. He had been diagnosed in December 2008, and did well until April 2009, when he became noticeably symptomatic. Despite being in a good bit of pain near the end, he played golf two days before he passed away Wednesday, June 3, at his home in Irving, Texas (outside Dallas), surrounded by his entire family.

Jack had four children, Margaret, Elizabeth, Brad, and Andrea. His wife Barbara, to whom he'd been married for nearly 37 years at the time of his death, tells a story about Jack that begins on Sunday, May 31, 2009.

Jack had retired to the study in their home and had begun typing a document on the computer. Their daughter Andrea, 33 years old at the time, happened to be in the room at the same time, didn't know what it was he was working on, but saw him finish it, print it out, and place it in the drawer of his desk. Jack died the following Wednesday, three days later. On June 10, after recovering from the shock of her father's death, Andrea returned to the desk and opened the drawer, and there found the letter, addressed to "Dear Friends & Family," that Jack had composed just days before, and to which Andrea had been an unknowing witness.

"Well ... I'm off on another trip!" That's how Jack began his posthumous letter. It is reprinted here [see side insert] with the permission of his family.

Jack was no stranger to cancer, or to near-death experiences. Barbara said their son Brad once said he had nine lives. In our 25th Reunion Yearbook in 1986, and in his farewell letter, he describes a battle in 1982 with what he called "a bizarre strain of cancer that attacked in '82" when he was 42 years old. His doctors were then calling it "an undifferentiated carcinoma" involving his right neck. They never found a primary tumor, said Barbara years later in September 2010, but suspected it was in the testicle region.

Writing in 1986, Jack said his family "played a very important and supportive role" in his successful fight against that 1982 cancer. Barbara said treatment required many trips to the Mayo Clinic, "very heavy doses of chemotherapy and 35 days of straight radiation to his neck." After combating both the cancer and the side effects of the medication, Jack "thankfully won out," she said, and never had a recurrence of that cancer again.

In 2005 Jack had heart surgery to remove a 95% blockage in the main artery. He recovered fully, with one stent. While in Dublin in 2007, he was about to cross a street, but pivoted at the curb at the last moment to look for Barbara in the crowd behind him, and barely missed walking in front of a barreling triple-decker bus.

Jack grew up and went to high school in Dayton, Ohio. He was president of the student council there, president of his class, and captain of both the baseball and football teams. He also was in the honor society, the glee club, on the debate team, and in dramatics.

At Dartmouth he majored in English, was a member of Delta Tau Delta, and for one year each was on the undergraduate council and glee club, and for the first two years played baseball.

After Dartmouth, Jack flew planes as a Naval aviator for five years, later writing about it for our 2001 (40th) Reunion Yearbook. "My flying experience, which was one of the highlights of my life, included flying high ranking government officials, including the Secretary of the Navy, Chief of Naval Operations, Commandant of the Marine Corps, and members of the U.S. Congress including the [then] current Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, and Congressman [now Senator] John McCain's father, Vice Admiral John S. McCain."

Jack spent a career in sales and marketing positions in the construction materials industry, time that includes 20 years with Owens-Corning Fiberglass, and about 14 years with Siplast, a commercial roofing products manufacturer, a position that entailed moving to Irving, Texas. In the course of his work with Siplast he encountered our classmates Tom Conger (who characterized the idea of becoming a customer of Jack's as an "astronomical coincidence"), Bill Glenn, and Cleve Carney. He retired in 2002.

Jack's next project was writing a book about baseball, entitled "Pop Flies and Line Drives: Visits With Players from Baseball's 'Golden Era'." An ardent baseball fan (he'd played the game and coached), Jack conceived of the idea of interviewing old baseball players — men like Allie Reynolds, Tom Henrich, Carl Erskine, Pete Suder, Mel Parnell — to get their views about the game, now that they'd left it. In all Jack interviewed about 76 former players (persuading many of them to autograph baseballs and bats).

Tom Conger, who suggested a publisher, writes about the endeavor that "Jack wrote a fun book about baseball, involving the surviving yeomen of our day, what they did after MLB [major league baseball], and what their fondest memories were; he had traveled the country to talk personally with his subjects, and some of their views were most revealing. Somewhat surprising was the accessibility Jack found in contacting those old ballplayers." Tom adds the comment that no way could this happen "with today's zillionaire prima donnas." The book is available, and reviewed by readers, at Amazon.com's website.