



John F. Hagen

March 24, 1950 - July 25, 2020

John Frederick Hagen, 70, of Traverse City, died on Saturday, July 25, 2020, having yielded gracefully to complications of a decade-long battle with younger-onset Alzheimer's disease.

John grew up in the Boardman neighborhood of Traverse City in the 1950s, and his childhood was an idyllic one where, on summer nights, best friends slept in backyard tents, played capture the flag and war games, chased one another through alleys on bikes, and attended Boy Scouts jamborees together. Many of the friends John made in those early years remained so throughout the decades, staying in close contact right up until the end of his life.

A lifelong student of the Great Lakes and her freshwater ecosystems, John was intimately attuned to the geographical, historical, cultural, folk, and sacred knowledge of northern Michigan, and he held the natural world close, particularly as his Alzheimer's advanced. On walks with his family, John continued to seek out nature's precious artifacts -- pine cones, small stones, bird feathers, tree bark, leaves, and acorns. He studied tree tops for his favorite corvids perched among branches and leaves, listened for the occasional loon sounding overhead, and looked with anticipation to neighbors' yards known for clucking chickens or lounging rabbits.

John loved travel, Michigan beer, poetry, Bob Dylan, North American and Latin jazz, birdsong, and the Arizona desert. John was an Eagle Scout, outdoorsman, conservationist, sailor, and fly fisherman. He was a brother, father, husband, and friend.

John was also committed to destigmatizing Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia; to that end, he shared his diagnosis freely with friends, family, and plenty of others he met along the way. Early on he stated simply, "There's no shame in Alzheimer's."

But long before Alzheimer's set in, John studied and worked, fell in love, married, and

embraced becoming a parent, the most rewarding role of his life. These are the details:

John graduated from Traverse City (Central) High School, obtained a bachelor's degree in sociology from Michigan State University (1968) and an MBA from University of Detroit (1985). He forged a long career in communications and government relations, beginning as a reporter for the Traverse City Record-Eagle and Oakland Press newspapers before pivoting into roles in state politics and then to the private sector with General Motors Corporation. In 1987, John accepted a faculty position teaching journalism and public relations at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff. While residing in Flagstaff, he also founded a public affairs firm representing various organizations including the U.S. Forest Service and Hopi Tribe.

John met Deirdre Mahoney, of Litchfield Park, Arizona, soon after moving to Flagstaff. They were married in Sedona in 1990, and welcomed son Jack in 1991. During this period, the family moved to the Phoenix area where John worked as Deputy Director for the Arizona Department of Agriculture and then Acting Director for the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality. By 2000, John could no longer ignore the lure of northern Michigan nor the small midwest town that had been so influential during his formative years, and so the family relocated to Traverse City, where John helped launch an early chapter of the Watershed Center of Grand Traverse Bay. In the final stretch of his career, he worked as a grant writer for Gourdie-Fraser. In retirement, John taught as an adjunct instructor at Northwestern Michigan College and volunteered with the Maritime Heritage Alliance.

John is survived by his wife of thirty years, Deirdre Mahoney; son John "Jack" of Traverse City, Michigan; brother Jim (Jeff Oishi) of Minneapolis; sister Kathy Wilson (Dave) of Indialantic, Florida; an aunt and uncle, many in-laws, nieces, and nephews. John was preceded in death by his parents, James Harold Hagen and Katherine "Kitty" Mitchell Hagen.

A celebration of life will be held in the garden at Reynolds-Jonkhoff Funeral Home Friday, July 31. Visitation is from 4 - 5 p.m. with remarks beginning at 5 p.m. Social distancing will be practiced.

The family suggests honoring John's life by planting a tree in honor of a loved one or making a contribution to The Anglers of the Au Sable River, an all-volunteer organization committed to environmental conservation.

Events

JUL 31 **Vistation for Family and Friends** 04:00PM - 05:00PM

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Reynolds-Jonkhoff Funeral Home

305 Sixth St, Traverse City, MI, US, 49684

JUL 31 **Celebration of Life** 05:00PM

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Reynolds-Jonkhoff Funeral Home

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Comments



“ Video Tribute



Reynolds Jonkhoff Funeral Home & Cremation Services - July 31 at 07:39 PM



“ Celebration of Life - Friday July 31, 2020



Reynolds Jonkhoff - August 01 at 09:11 AM



“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



Mike Wildman - July 31 at 02:36 PM



“ John became my uncle when I was 10 years old. I remember thinking it was curious that he seemed equally amused by my stories of the 5th grade as he did with any of the adult conversations. But, now after knowing John for 30 years, I know it wasn't unusual at all. He gave his full attention and respect to everyone he met. He made everyone feel important, funny, and intelligent. Laughed enthusiastically at everyone's jokes, and listened attentively to every story. He was truly brilliant and had a lifelong intellectual curiosity. The last few years, with Deirdre and Jack by his side, he forged ahead courageously. He was an authentically kind and gentle soul that made our family and the world so much better for having known and loved him.

Erin Bogen - July 31 at 01:52 AM



“ John was a good friend, a gracious human being, and an example of all that is right in the world. His interest in people and his curiosity in all aspects of life was a delight to behold; not a visit went by without John asking about, or offering an observation regarding, my area of research. John was always interested in everything and everyone, and his level of engagement was both refreshing and inspirational. My family and I will sincerely miss John’s kindness, sense of humor, and warm personality. His struggle is over, but the lessons he taught will endure. Our sympathies to Deirdre, Jack, and their extended family.
— Dr. Mark Howell

Mark Howell - July 29 at 10:48 AM



“ Thank you, John. You were and are my dear friend. You made my life better than it ever could have been without you. We had many great visits, and as intelligent as you were, I will always remember your kindness, your sincere heart. You have a tremendous legacy in Deirdre and Jack. I was blessed to be part of both your and Deirdre’s hiring at NMC. I got to watch you and your family grow and prosper. God’s Speed, Brother. I love you. Garyn

Garyn G. Roberts - July 28 at 09:19 PM



“ "Ad Meliora."

Martin Sommerness - July 28 at 09:07 PM



“ John Hagen's presence in my life was a gift.

In the beginning, we played together on our elementary school's playground; more recently when our schedules allowed, we ate lunch and drank beer with old friends. Over that sixty-some year friendship, I have too many fond memories to select a favorite. Adventures in southern Spain, San Francisco, northern Ontario, and while room-mates cemented our friendship and increased my appreciation of his character. The closeness of camping and fishing with John in his final years revealed his heart.

John was a groomsman at my wedding and became Vicki's dear friend, and then our daughters' friend too.

Jack and Deirdre, you are my heroes for the loving care you gave him and for your "openness" during these challenging years. Thank you for making it easy to stay close.

Mike & Vicki Wildman

Mike & Vicki Wildman - July 28 at 04:51 PM



“ Having John in my life was an adventure. We took weekend trips in my MG, traveled to the quake on Falls in the winter, then skied up the river to see the falls from below. We skiing in Agawa Canyon having taken the packet train to some unknown trail. We shared our brotherhood as Delta Sigma Phi roommates. I busted him when he was at GM, then with the Lt. Gov. We spent a lost week in Minneapolis delivering furniture to his brother. I met Deirdre while visiting Flagstaff as an editor in residence with him at NAU. And we spent over three decades fly fishing our trout streams. Jack and Deirdre, you are my heroes with all of the love and care you gave John. We will have memories to share in the future...

John & Meg Russell - July 28 at 06:40 PM



“ Taquamenon

John & Meg Russell - July 28 at 06:41 PM



“ Visited, not busted

John & Meg Russell - July 28 at 06:42 PM



“ We met Deirdre and John through our Alzheimer's support group about 5 years ago, and with our shared interests, became fast friends. Together we enjoyed biking, hiking, sailing class, gardening, group dinners out and in and concerts. Knowing John enriched our lives and we will forever be grateful to them both for sharing our journeys through Alzheimer's together.

We have the utmost respect and admiration for Jack and Deirdre in the loving and practical way they care for John. He will be missed.

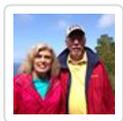
Joan and Pat Fitzgibbon

Joan Fitzgibbon - July 28 at 10:00 PM



“ Our condolences on the passing of your husband, father and friend. Sincerely, Pam & Dan Kaiser & Sons

Pamela Kaiser - July 29 at 10:07 AM



“ My deepest condolences to Deirdre and Jack on the passing of their dearest John. It was my privilege to have known him for such a short time.

Paul - July 30 at 11:21 AM



“ John was such a wonderful teaching colleague who guided his students gently. I remember his wry sense of humor and how he patiently waited for you to catch his perspective.

Melissa Sprenkle - July 31 at 01:46 PM



“ Thinking of Deirdre, Jack and their entire group of family and friends.
Sending big love,
Susan Odgers & Tom Mair

