

Dearest friends, family, and fans of John Slais.

It is with both a sense of relief and great sadness that I share the news that my Father passed away peacefully on November 9, 2021, just a few days after celebrating his 89th birthday. I'll tell you; he was just convinced it was his 90th birthday and in the end we didn't argue. He even had candles on his cake that said "90" so he got what he wanted.

My sister Adrienne had shared his upcoming birthday on Facebook and my Dad received so many cards and notes through the mail as well as online. I read every single message to him, every single card, and he responded so proudly, he felt honored to be remembered by so many. Even more than what it did for my Dad is what it did for me and my family. Your outpouring of kindness was a comfort for our aching hearts knowing this would be his last birthday. Little did we know how quickly after he would be gone.

On Wednesday November 3 I managed to get him into his wheelchair for one last haircut and shave. It was a struggle for him but he was a trooper. The care facility hired a singer and he and the 5 other residents plus caregivers came into his room to sing him Happy Birthday. He mouthed along with the song, it was just precious, and my heart was bursting.

My sister Deanna flew in the next day on his birthday and when we arrived, he was dressed in his favorite pink button down shirt. Jocelyn from the facility had made a huge batch of Filipino pancit, a celebratory noodle dish, purchased a cake, decorated, and had lots of other food. He was pretty tired but with one last grand effort we got him into the wheelchair, out to the dining room table, where we lit the candles on his cake and sang to him again. I helped him blow out his candles and began to cut a little corner slice for him. He took the server from me, dipped it in the frosting and took a big lick! Then he did it again with a wry smile. I gave him a piece and he went back to bed in his room. It was so juvenile and so darned cute. What a memory to have.

Saturday we came and by then I'd received a lot more mail to read to him including all the printed FB messages from Adrienne's page. It took over 15 minutes to read them all to him. He was thrilled and opened his eyes to look at the included pictures. He received well wishes from all over the world. I hung more cards next to his bed so he was surrounded by love and appreciation. Deanna was heading home and we said goodbye and were walking out when he said quite firmly, "I love you so much...I love you ALL so much". This was not the usual good-bye, talk to you later, this was different. Deanna and I immediately ran back to him and told him we know he loves us and each of us love him so much. On the way home I couldn't stop crying and I called Summer and Adrienne to let them know what Dad had said. A few hours later Jocelyn called to say my Dad had changed and she was calling in the Hospice nurse. I ended up rushing back and indeed, his breathing was more labored, his oxygen levels were really low, and he was having pain for the first time, mainly in his legs. I approved starting him on comfort medications (morphine and others) and when he finally fell asleep that was the last he was ever awake.

Adrienne and Summer flew in the next morning, Deanna canceled her flight home and we began the vigil of being with him day and night. Taking breaks to sleep at his house, then back and cramming in his tiny shared space, watching him breathe, talking to him and hoping that he could hear all we were saying. By Monday Summer and Deanna needed to return home. Adrienne and I remained. The Hospice nurse and facility nurse were just amazed at how my Dad was hanging on. Tuesday night was rough, we were exhausted and by 1am we decided to leave and sleep, the nurse said he's call if any changes. We got a call about an hour and a half later and rushed back in time for him to stabilize, it was as if he knew we were back and he returned to much more normal vitals. We sat there and waited and at 6:55 AM he exhaled and Adrienne noticed he didn't inhale. She elbowed me and I looked intently, no inhale, next she elbowed the hospice nurse, he confirmed and started the 15-minute wait period to call time of death. 7:10 AM November 9.

It was peaceful, he was without pain, he knew how loved he was, we all had our moment to say good-bye, no regrets, as difficult as it was leading up to this point in hind sight it probably couldn't have gone any better.

It's been 2-1/2 weeks as I write this. We finished the obituary (Adrienne did an amazing job writing it) and I have been dealing with the legal stuff, cremation arrangements, obit submissions, paperwork, and Thanksgiving in the middle of it all! It's been a roller coaster of emotion. Yesterday was a day spent mostly crying. Today I know I need to get this note out as I want to share with you my deepest appreciation for your support, cards, kind words...

Now that both our parents are gone it's hard not to feel the weight of being orphaned. As the oldest of the three of us, I also feel the added responsibility of forging ahead as the matriarch. I'm honored, I'm bewildered, sometimes I'm struggling, most of the time I'm just adulting and getting stuff done.

I'm fortunate to have the most loving family. There's no tension over things and stuff, money and possessions. There's a deep and fierce devotion that was modeled by both my Mom and Dad. Family. What would I do without my family? We are tighter than ever.

So to wrap this up and end on a positive note. We have also laughed, laughed remembering good times and funny stories, laughed because when you get the Slais girls together it's only a matter of time before hilarity ensues. Life goes on, and we are looking forward to many more good times in the future taking to heart the quote Adrienne shared in my Dad's obit:

"Life should not be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well-preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside in a cloud of smoke, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming 'Wow! What a ride!'" Hunter S. Thompson

Thank you. Thank you for everything. To those who never met my Dad, just taking a moment to share a note on FB or send a card, what an impact that had on my Dad and all of us. We are forever grateful. For my Dad's friends and family, thank you for your constant encouragement and love. Thank you to all who sent birthday cards and gifts. Our wish for you all is that you be richly blessed. That you know you are appreciated beyond words can express. Just having celebrated Thanksgiving, I gave thanks for each and every one of you. We are wishing you a very happy Christmas and New Year. May you take this time to express your love to those in your immediate circles. There's no time like the present to let it be known. With love, gratitude, appreciation, and lastly hope.

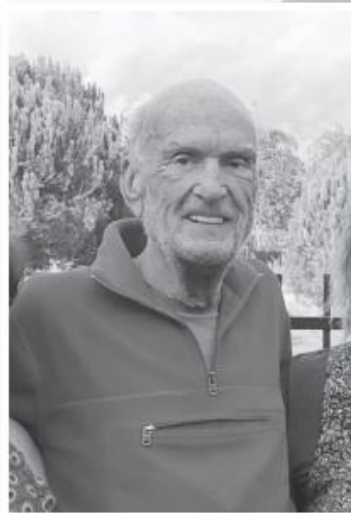
Mara, Adrienne, Deanna, and Summer,
for the Slais, Klassen, Grechman and Leibman families.



JOHN M SLAIS



*November 1932 –
November 2021*



John M Slais died of old age peacefully in his sleep November 9, 2021, in Somis, CA.

Is it possible to be true to three different loves? If you are John Slais, the answer is an unequivocal YES. Family, Aviation, Music...the true loves of John Slais.

John Slais was born November 4, 1932, in Los Angeles, CA to Mildred Lala and John Chocek. His father died while John was still in utero, then he was adopted by the father who raised him, George Slais. "Adventure" would be his middle name, but in reality, it was simply "M".

Music. At a young age, John showed an interest in music. From playing piano, to door-to-door accordion sales, to starting a band The Rythmeers, his love of jazz piano only grew. He was blessed by seeing Bill Evans and Tony Scott in Japan; befriending the greatest jazz musicians of the 20th century like friends Red Callender, Buddy Collette, Bill Douglass, and Gerald "Wig" Wiggins; and participating in jam sessions at home and all over Los Angeles. His influences were Bill Evans, and later Chick Corea, Bill Mays, Oscar Peterson, and his dear friend Gerald Wiggins. Dad composed music for the love of his life, Mary Claire Slais (Deceased 2008) and his three children. He continued playing the piano up until the month before his death.

Aviation. At the age of 14, John would spend his free time at Brackett Field Airport, washing airplanes for rides. He earned his student license at 16, starting a lifelong adventure in aviation. He joined the Navy at 17, lying about his age, then received an officers candidate slot in the USAF shortly thereafter.

He notably flew the F-86 Sabre and the F-104 Starfighter joining the first generation of Mach busters and going on to exceed Mach 2. He was the "Top Gun" of his squadron. In 1967 John was hired at United Airlines. He spent a 25-year career at United mainly flying his favorite, the Boeing 727. After retiring from United, the USAF, and the ANG, he continued in general aviation up until his 85th year. Although not flying in recent years, he still hung out at Camarillo Airport with his buddies the "Hanger Bums" recounting old war stories. In addition to flying, John served with the Camarillo Airport Authority, President of the EAA (Experimental Aircraft Association) Chapter 723, a proud QB (Quiet Birdman), while also being involved in the NAA (National Aeronautics Association), the local Wings over Camarillo airshows, Make A Wish Foundation, Young Eagles, Civil Air Patrol, and many other aviation related endeavors. He flew over 60 types of aircraft, from Ultralights to a B-52, throughout his life and even jumped out of one on his 80th birthday. He accumulated in excess of 15,000 hours of flight time.

Family. As a hot fighter pilot at Selfridge AFB Michigan, he met an innocent, equally hot, art teacher, Mary Claire Miller. They married in 1965 and each successive year had three children, Mara, Adrienne, and Deanna. They moved often the first four years of their marriage eventually settling in Thousand Oaks, AKA "Thousand Pilots." The family enjoyed hiking the hills of Thousand Oaks, traveling the country, and to Czechoslovakia to visit relatives. He divided his time between watching his daughters horseshow competitions, sports, and plays; riding his motorcycle; flying for work – and then for fun; and hosting jam sessions at their house. Although John and Mary Claire divorced after 32 years, he loved her until her death and poured his devotion into his children, their spouses, and his grandchildren.

John lived HARD. He loved to party. He loved to go fast. He loved to travel. He loved the freedom of jazz and the freedom of flight. He was a voracious reader and an even more voracious doer. Hunter S. Thompson summed up his philosophy on life as such: "Life should not be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well-preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside in a cloud of smoke, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming 'Wow! What a ride!'" May we all live a little like John Slais.

John Slais was preceded in death by his parents and ex-wife Mary Claire Slais. John is survived by daughters Mara Klassen (husband Manley) of Oxnard, CA, Adrienne Grechman (husband Ray) of Kentfield, CA, Deanna Leibman (husband Ilya) of Tucson, AZ; three granddaughters, Summer Slais, Charlotte Grechman, Roxanne Grechman, and step-grandsons Ryne Klassen, Caleb Klassen, Jacob Klassen, Norman Asimwe, Alexander Leibman, and great-granddaughter Avielle Claire Asimwe. John is also survived by daughter Virginia Thomas (husband John) and their 4 children and 4 grandchildren.

A Celebration of Life and Memorial will be held on January 15, 2022, from 11:00 AM to 2:00 PM at the EAA Hangar (next to the CAF Hangar), Camarillo Airport, 501 Aviation Drive, Camarillo, CA 93010. For more information, email jmslais@aol.com or call Adrienne at 415-637-2891.