



John Russell Zulauf

April 25, 1945 - March 18, 2026

John Russell Zulauf took his final breath on March 18, 2026 in Santa Rosa, California. After surviving a serious motorcycle accident and several bouts with cancer in recent years, it was Parkinson's disease that his worn and weary body could not overcome. He was 80 years old.

John was born on April 25, 1945 and grew up in Ubly, Michigan, where early on he displayed a sharp engineering mind and a great aptitude for working with his hands. He developed a growing interest in learning about how things worked, and importantly, how to fix them when they no longer did. John came to especially enjoy working on cars, as he could often be seen lying beneath an undercarriage or hunched over an engine for hours on end.

As a young man, John apprenticed with his father, Floyd, to learn the trade of floor covering. Soon after, John married his high school sweetheart, Gail, and joined the Navy. In the Navy, he put his knowledge of engines to good use as he was assigned to work in the engine room of his ship. Decades later, he could still explain in impressive detail how to overhaul its massive engines.

After his Naval service was complete, John and Gail returned to Michigan where they had their first child; a son, Eric. After several years, the young family decided to venture out to California and put down new roots. They bought a home in Sonoma County, and John found work in the floor covering

industry in the San Francisco Bay Area. He also attended night school at Santa Rosa Junior College and earned his Associate of Arts degree. During one of his final exams, John had to rush out to join his laboring wife at the hospital. Shortly after, their daughter, Dana, was welcomed into the family.

In the early 1980s, John became interested in learning to fly small airplanes. He enrolled in a local flight school and earned his private pilot's license. An adventurer at heart, flying quickly became a passion of John's and he enjoyed many years of taking to the sky with his family. A particularly treasured destination was a remote part of California's northern coast called Shelter Cove. John fell in love with the area and spent years building a house there. He delighted in taking long walks on its black sand beach and visiting its neighboring forests of towering coast redwoods. Additionally, it was a beautiful place to fly his beloved airplane! He built a hangar for it nearby and spent much of his early retirement appreciating life amid the beauty of "The Lost Coast".

In his time spent among us, John touched many lives and enjoyed countless adventures. His was a life well-lived, and he will be greatly missed by all who were fortunate to know and love him. John is survived by his son, Eric, and daughter-in-law, Marie; his daughter, Dana; his partner, Ruth; his siblings, Don, Gary, Gregg, and Anne; as well as his many in-laws, nieces, nephews, cousins, and friends. He was preceded in death by his parents, Floyd and Elizabeth; his sister, Barbara; his first wife, Gail; and his second wife, Jahna.

A celebration of John's life will be held in California this July, and another in Michigan this August. Details will follow as plans are confirmed. In lieu of flowers or gifts, the family kindly requests that donations be made to any of the following organizations in loving memory of John, and in honor of those still enduring Parkinson's disease: The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research, Parkinson's Foundation, and American Parkinson

Disease Association.

Tribute Wall

DZ

“ 6 files added to the album Photos of John



Dana Zulauf - April 18 at 11:39 PM



John and I were very old friends, and competitors. He had the best jump shot that I had ever seen in high school. We had a blast going to Greencastle Ind for a Science seminar... I think both of our parents wanted us to be scientists....A disappointment that made us smile..A few years ago, we had the opportunity to link up here in CA.. It was fun to relive the years in Ubly and in Ubly High School.. We were thankful for those early years. The world and his family lost a free spirit with John's passing. We are fortunate in having the memories of a good time past. Bill Osak

Bill Osak - April 23 at 11:14 PM