



Obituary

Born: Friday, February 15, 1935

Died: Tuesday, July 16, 2019

Friends say John Gardner lived nine lives and was working on the next nine when he died Tuesday, July 16, in an accident near his home on Logan Rd., south of Charlo. The architect, furniture maker, chef, entrepreneur, former sailor and reluctant sheep rancher was also a devoted companion to his wife, Susan, for more than 40 years. He accomplished much in his 84 years with wit, grace and an endearing sense of humor.

John Wesley Marshall Gardner was born on Feb. 15, 1935, in Baltimore, Maryland, to Edith Cushing Marshall and William M. Gardner. He attended the Calvert School in Baltimore and entered The Governor's Academy in Byfield, Massachusetts, in 1951, where he played sports and sang tenor with the school's Meistersingers.

Service Summary

Funeral Service

10:30 AM Sat Aug 17, 2019

St. Andrew Episcopal Church

110 Sixth Ave. East
Polson, MT 59860

He welcomed stepfather Ed Hall into his family and gained from him the life lessons of generosity and being a gentleman.

John studied civil engineering at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, and pursued post-graduate studies in architectural engineering. He was a member of the U.S. Marine Corps.

He and Suzy Ray were married in 1957 and they had two daughters, Kathy and Phoebe. They were later divorced.

After his military service, John went to work for Merritt-Chapman & Scott, a noted marine salvage and construction firm with worldwide operations. His employment took him from a dam-building project in the Amazon jungle to driving a barge in the Caribbean, where he earned his maritime captain's license. Somewhere along the way, he attended cooking school in Bermuda.

Always ready for a challenge, his next enterprise was working side by side with master carpenters on historic restoration and remodeling projects in Annapolis, Maryland. There, he met Susan Hodges. He invited her to go sailing for two weeks, and they spent the next two-and-a-half years teaching sailing and delivering sailboats from the Bahamas to New England.

Along the way, they survived several hurricanes, storms that pounded their vessel with 30-foot waves, and "blissful boredom, when the only sound was the slap of waves against the hull and the wind in the rigging."

John and Susan were married in 1977, and John built them a

home in Clumber, Maryland. Their son, Jonathan, was born in 1981 in Annapolis.

Before they were married, Susan warned John that she was determined to move back to her home state of Montana. And she did, with son and husband in tow. John left his East Coast life willingly, having sat “at one too many stoplights.”

They spent a year living with her parents, Larry and Eileen Hodges, at the family home south of Charlo, and in 1985, John began converting the adjacent barn into their home.

He and Susan also bought Stanley Scarce’s automotive shop on Main Street in Ronan and transformed it into a local landmark, The Rabbit Tree, which housed a popular restaurant, art gallery, woodworking shop and office spaces.

Although the building and its businesses were consumed by fire in 1989, John continued to build, constructing cottages near the family home, designing and repairing furniture, and crafting everything from boxes and flower planters to birdhouses and small buildings in his well-equipped shop.

His ability to put on a good party was legendary, whether it was a raucous Maryland crab feast served to friends and neighbors, an intimate candlelit dinner of roast lamb, or pancakes, delivered like Frisbees to his son and friends.

From the kitchen to the woodshop, he shared his talents generously. He was friend and mentor to many, and always believed in “the power of fun.” He made people laugh with his wry, mischievous twinkle, impish grin and penchant for nicknames. While he disdained his wife’s sheep, he was masterful at cooking their progeny.

He loved the Mission Mountains – particularly the family’s patch of woods near McDonald Lake. John reveled in managing the forest, especially with help from Ernie Hunt and his two sons, Robert and Rusty.

John also had an aptitude for devotion. He took care of his mother, “Cush,” the last five years of her life in the “granny flat” adjacent to their house. And for more than 40 years, he served black tea at the perfect temperature, measured with his trusty infrared thermometer gun and flavored with milk and honey, to his wife every morning. He summoned her from the sheep barn or pasture for lunch and dinner, and surrounded her with an intense and caring love.

John was preceded in death by his parents, Cushing and William Gardner; his stepfather, Ed Hall; his daughter, Kathy Bright; his parents-in-law Larry and Eileen Hodges; and his brother-in-law, Rae Hodges.

He leaves behind his wife, Susan of Charlo; his daughter,

Phoebe Bright of South Hero, Vermont; his son, U.S. Army Capt. Jonathan Gardner (Janelle); and his grandchildren, Jennabelle, Grayden, Tiella, Emmalynn and Jameson of Schofield Barracks on Oahu, Hawaii; his sister-in-law, Amanda Hodges of Charlo; his nieces, Mary Hodges of Montana and Argentina and Meg Von Behren (Dan) of New York; and Schnibble the Schnauzer.

Funeral services are set for 10:30 a.m. on Aug. 17 at St. Andrew Episcopal Church in Polson. A potluck party will follow at the family farm on Logan Rd., south of Charlo. In lieu of flowers please make donations to Charlo/Moiese Volunteer Dept., 56648 Montana 212, Charlo, MT 59824.