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— John H. Saiki, MD, 2011


...For the secret of the care of the patient is in caring for the patient.

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(Jack’s favorite quote)
John Harris Saiki, known as “Jack” to many, was born on December 31, 1936 in Grand Forks, North Dakota to Lydia Elizabeth Kuoppala and Arthur Kazu Saiki, M.D. He spent most of his childhood in Grand Forks and three formative years in Kauai, Hawaii. Jack received his Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science from the University of North Dakota. He graduated from medical school at McGill University in Montreal, Canada in 1961. It was there that he met his future wife, Julie Singleton. They were married September 1, 1962 in Glens Falls, New York. Jack served two years with the United States Public Health Service in Fort Defiance, Arizona. He completed his residency and fellowship training in medicine and hematology at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine and his oncology training at the University of Texas, M.D. Anderson Cancer Center.

Jack was Professor Emeritus at the University of New Mexico Department of Medicine, Hematology/Oncology Division. His career on faculty spanned forty-four years; it can be said he lived the history of modern day oncology. Jack joined the faculty at the University of New Mexico School of Medicine in 1970. With the support of a grant from the federally funded New Mexico Regional Medical Program, Jack developed a leukemia/lymphoma treatment program, at a time when no formal medical oncology program existed in New Mexico. He was also awarded funding from the National Institutes of Health in support of his membership in the Southwest Oncology Group, which ushered in cancer clinical trials and new cancer treatments for New Mexicans. In 1973, Jack received board certification in medical oncology, the year the subspecialty of medical oncology was first created.

Jack served in various capacities while on the faculty, including Clinical Director of the University of New Mexico Cancer Center and Principal Investigator for the Southwest Oncology Group. In addition, Jack served on the Board of Trustees for Blood Systems for twenty-nine years and was Medical Director of the Presbyterian Hospice Program. Jack was the recipient of numerous awards for teaching and service, including the Laureate Award by the New Mexico Chapter of the American College of Physicians and nine Khatali Awards, an honor bestowed by each graduating class of the University of New Mexico School of Medicine in recognition of teaching excellence. Throughout his career, Jack loved teaching but patient care was foremost in his heart. The patient always came first in his practice of medicine. Jack was beloved for his humility, compassion, integrity and dedication.

Jack and his wife of fifty-two years, Julie, shared a mutual love of the Southwest, hiking, birding, identifying wildflowers and enjoying the tranquility of the Taos mountains. He was deeply loved and admired by his three children. He encouraged them to carve out their own unique paths and, importantly, to appreciate the journey. He was a beloved granddad. With his playful spirit and love of teaching, he spent endless hours with his grandchildren on projects fostering their love of science and nature. Jack’s curiosity and appreciation of life included photography, tennis, geology, woodworking, taking up the banjo at age forty, and driving his ‘66 Volvo. His gift for storytelling, endearing sense of humor, and gentle nature remained ever-present to the end. While it is impossibly difficult to let him go, we know he made an indelible difference in the lives of many people and that his teachings will carry forward through his family, friends, patients, students and colleagues. We celebrate Jack and his life well lived.

Jack will forever remain in the hearts of his wife Julie; his three children, Beth, Bill and Catherine; his grandchildren, Anna Priya Gupte, Anand Gupte and Alexander Saiki; son-in-law Viru Gupte and daughter-in-law Jocelyn Saiki; and his brother George and extended family.
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