

Northfield, Minnesota  
July 4, 2022

Michael Henry Harper Jr. passed away on the morning of June 30, after a brief illness. His wife Susan cared for him in his last days. The family has gathered in Northfield to reflect on his life.

It was a long life full of accomplishment and adventure. Mike was born on March 27, 1942, in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, and lived in Larchmont, New York as a boy. His family sent him to Kent School, a boarding school in Connecticut, for high school. At Kent, Mike excelled at academics and rowing. He completed his studies a year early and was accepted to Harvard University in 1959.

At Harvard, Mike studied history, and immersed himself in student life. He continued his rowing career, and attempted football, wrestling and cheerleading with varying levels of success. He would later describe his grades during this period as “gentleman’s C’s.” Also at Harvard, Mike met Susan Schugel, a young woman from Minnesota attending nearby Simmons College, whom he would eventually marry in 1963.

Mike had attended Harvard on a Navy ROTC scholarship, and upon his graduation in 1963 he joined the Marine Corps as a Lieutenant. He entered naval flight training and earned his wings in 1965. In 1966, he was assigned to VMF-235, a Marine fighter squadron headquartered in Da Nang, Vietnam. Mike flew dozens of missions in Vietnam, mainly supporting Marine ground operations. He served with distinction, earning a Distinguished Flying Cross for heroism in combat, along with a promotion to Captain. Mike’s first son Michael Henry Harper III was born while Mike was in Vietnam.

Having survived Vietnam and fulfilled his military commitment, Mike declined an opportunity to continue his Marine Corps career, and instead entered Harvard Law School in 1968. After graduating from law school in 1971, Mike joined the Faegre & Benson law firm and moved the family to Minneapolis, Minnesota. Mike’s second son Franklin Maxwell Harper was born in 1976, somewhat unexpectedly, and the family was complete. Over the years until his retirement around 2006, Mike worked on a wide variety of corporate and finance transactions, mentored young lawyers, and developed the firm’s business. During this period Faegre grew from a modest local firm to one that is international in scope, with over 1,000 lawyers.

Max attended Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, and Mike and Susan had always enjoyed visiting him there. When Mike retired, he and Susan moved to Northfield permanently. He met many new friends there and had time for travel and new hobbies. Mike was a skilled scuba diver and dived in exotic locations like Palau and Belize, sometimes accompanied by Susan. He was an avid reader and lifelong student of history, and taught courses at the local collegium.

Even when his health started to fade, Mike’s intellectual capacity was undiminished. He could write a perfect letter, and he was an irrepressible talker. He continued to prepare his course on oceanic history until the last week of his life.

Mike’s descendants include Michael’s daughter Maggie and Max’s children Ivy and Clay. Mike loved his sons and was proud of his grandchildren, particularly Clay whom he viewed as a kindred spirit, and he was fond of Michael’s wife Amy and Max’s wife Cindy. But he loved Susan most of all.

Mike’s optimism never waned. Until the end he believed a bright future, or at least another pleasant evening in the garden at his home in Northfield, was right around the corner.

Mike donated to The Nature Conservancy on a regular basis, and would be happy if you did so, if you are so moved.

The Harpers