



James (Jim) Thomas Cramer

September 24, 1933 - March 30, 2025

James (Jim) Thomas Cramer was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota on September 24, 1933, and was raised in Hopkins, Minnesota. He passed away at the age of 91 on March 30, 2025, at Brookdale Senior Living in Lakewood, Colorado. He is survived by his wife of 63 years, Marilyn Cramer, and three children: Loni and her spouse Pat, Lisa and her spouse Michael, David and his spouse Kavitha. He was the oldest child and is survived by his youngest sister, Holly, who lives in Montana with her spouse Frank. He is preceded in death by his sister Gail, who passed in 2012.

Jim was first and foremost a family man, easily and happily putting the needs of his wife and children above his own. His family was the joy of his life. He adored Marilyn as a wife, partner, and friend. Wherever his children moved, he arranged to visit - Minneapolis, Costa Rica, Japan, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Colorado. He jumped on every phone call, Zoom, and FaceTime with his children, no matter when and no matter what he was doing. Jim was the kind of father who wanted to be with his family in all things, to create memories through adventures and activities. Giving his family new experiences and exposure to the world was important to him. He taught Marilyn and the kids to downhill ski, waterski, and sail. He planned fun family vacations. Duluth, Minnesota and the Badlands of North Dakota were two of his favorite places; he loved finding off-the-beaten-path places to explore. He documented all of it through photos, slides, and videos - often with a large, old-school video

camera on his shoulder. While Jim and Marilyn had some exciting adventures that included Hawai'i and Europe, Jim was just as delighted exploring his own backyard.

Having an active outdoor life was important, and this was something he liked to share with others, especially his family. Living on a lake provided ample opportunities for recreation, including boating, sailing, swimming, fishing, water-skiing, and simply listening to the loons. The love of the outdoors did not end at the lake. Cycling was one of Jim's favorite activities, and he might subtly boast about how many miles he had ridden on any given day. He even picked up rollerblading at an older age. The cold Minnesota winters were not to stop the outdoor fun; Jim and Marilyn loved to cross-country ski and ice-skate, too. Then there was hockey. Jim loved going to his son, David's, hockey games, and he became quite a fan of the sport.

Jim's family, it should be noted, extended beyond his wife and children, parents and siblings, to the animals who shared their home, especially his dear friend Roxy, a beautiful collie who the family cherished. A love for animals didn't stop at those in his family, it also included any dog or cat he might meet or any wildlife he might encounter, from birds to mice. Jim loved feeding and watching the birds, especially the hummingbirds. Marilyn tells a sweet story of Jim sparing the life of a mouse he'd found in the garage because "its little face was just too cute."

Jim was a principled person who embraced the value of hard work, having a varied career that included military service and owning two successful businesses. Jim was graduated from the University of Minnesota in December of 1955, earning a Bachelor of Business Administration degree. While engaging in his studies at the University, he worked at Sears and Roebuck, was a member of Sigma Chi fraternity, and served in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC). After college, Jim enlisted in the U.S. Air Force where

he flew a KC97 Pilot Air Refueling plane. He was stationed primarily in Florida and in the Azores, Portugal. He documented his experiences in those locations via photography, a well-honed skill and hobby of Jim's.

After his Air Force service, Jim returned to Minneapolis and worked first at McCulloch Boating Company and then at Munsingwear as Production Control Supervisor. He met Marilyn Prosser (Cramer), who was teaching first-grade students at Central Lutheran Church in downtown Minneapolis, at a young-adult gathering. They fell in love and were married on August 19, 1961.

Jim and Marilyn wanted to build a life around family, and they took a major career leap by moving to Austin, Minnesota where they purchased and operated a small motel, the Sterling Motel. Their home was attached to the office of the motel, and the motel included two family-loved features - a swimming pool and a pear tree. The business was a great success, and five years later they bought a larger motel, the Four Seasons Best Western, in Wadena, Minnesota, with a restaurant, lounge, and conference rooms; this motel included a swimming pool and a hot tub! (The Cramers love hot tubs!) They designed and built a home attached to the business, so that the family could be close. The Four Seasons was their family business for 21 years.

Jim was an active member of the communities where he lived. He was President, Vice President, and Secretary of the Rotary Club in Wadena. He sang in the church choir for many years and served as a church usher. He was passionate about giving blood and received numerous awards for his donations. In total, he gave 18 gallons. Also, when living in Wadena, harkening back to his time in the Air Force, he embraced his love of flying by buying, with two friends, a small airplane called a Mooney.

In 1994, Jim and Marilyn bought his parents' cabin on Sylvan Lake in

Brainerd, Minnesota. They turned this home into their dream retirement home, where they lived for 20 years. In retirement, Jim continued working part-time driving a school bus for special-education students in Brainerd and for Medi-Van. He volunteered for Habitat for Humanity, Meals on Wheels, and the Food Shelf, and he remained active at church.

In 2014, Jim and Marilyn moved to a town house in Lakewood, Colorado (near Denver) where two of his children and their spouses live. Colorado was a place Jim loved to visit and a place where he had dreamed of living. Jim and Marilyn jumped into Colorado life with zest. Jim was active in their neighborhood community and at church, and he swam, biked, hiked, and explored.

Jim suffered a stroke in 2019 and a hip fracture in 2023. Though he was amazingly resilient, his health slowly and continually declined. He was most recently living in Brookdale Senior Living, a skilled-care facility in Lakewood. He was known for having a stuffed animal collie, named Roxy, under his arm. To distinguish his clothes from the other residents', he had animal-paw patches sewn into his clothes. Throughout his time in nursing care, his family kept him comfortable and lifted his spirits through conversation, laughter, and music - three essentials in his life.

Jim loved conversation. He was interested in people's everyday lives. A curious man, he asked lots of questions, and would start conversations with anyone he met while he was out-and-about. Jim always had a smile on his face and a kind word for people he encountered - both acquaintances and strangers. He was always happy to talk about cars, planes, tools, and repair work. And he loved to joke around. Jim had a dry sense of humor that he delivered with a side smile and sparkle in his eye. He often cracked jokes when no one expected it. He also got a kick out of surprising people by

peering through a window or around a corner, just for a laugh.

Jim loved music - big band, jazz, classical, and adult contemporary. He impressed Marilyn with his record collection when they were first dating. He attended all the kids' piano, organ, band, and choir concerts. An excellent whistler, he could often be heard whistling along to the radio.

It was a tradition for him to call his children and their spouses on their birthdays and to whistle Happy Birthday on their answering machines - with precision and vibrato. Jim knew many artists by name and throughout his life surprised everyone with his knowledge of music, even during his time at Brookdale. Those close to Jim will think of him when they hear "A Taste of Honey," by Herb Alpert; "Take Five," by Dave Brubeck; "(They Long to Be) Close to You," by the Carpenters; and "Moonlight Serenade," by the Glenn Miller Orchestra.

Jim leaves an enduring mark on this world, characterized with love, patience, grace, and humor. He is remembered lovingly by those who knew him, especially by his family.

The celebration of Jim's life will be Saturday, April 5, at 1:00pm MT in the Chapel at Bethany Lutheran Church, 4500 E. Hampden Ave, Cherry Hills Village, Colorado, 80013. There will be a reception following the service. In lieu of flowers, please consider making a memorial contribution to the American Cancer Society, American Heart Association, or a charity of your choice.