



## John Bradford Lilja, Jr.

August 13, 1969 - July 31, 2024

John Bradford Lilja, Jr, known to childhood friends as "Brad" and to General Tommy Franks as "Stretch", age 54, passed peacefully at home on July 31, 2024 after an 8-month battle with small-cell carcinoma. He was surrounded by family, and knew that he was loved.

John was born August 13, 1969 to John Sr. & Dorothy (Dot) Lilja in Minneapolis. He & his sister Emily grew up in the East Isles area of Uptown. John graduated from the Summatech program at Minneapolis North High School in 1987 and went on to earn a degree (and a half) in Architecture from the University of Minnesota.

John joined the Navy in 1989 and spent 4 years in active duty. He met his wife Dolly Ragudo in 1991 while stationed in Yokohama, Japan. Dolly moved to Minnesota and they were married on May 7, 1994. Despite his cancer progressing, they celebrated their 30th anniversary with about 50 friends & family this past May.

John remained in the Navy Reserves, retiring in 2018 as a Lieutenant Senior Chief. He was "called up" twice to go to war as a reservist: once to Bahrain for the ramp-up to the Iraq War in 2002, and once to Afghanistan in 2011-12. It is likely his time in Afghanistan that led to the "war cancer" that killed him.

Though John lived most of his life in Minneapolis, he was adventurous, and traveled all over the world. His time in the Navy took him from Australia to Afghanistan to Abu Dhabi. He also traveled a lot with his family, from Costa Rica to the Philippines to the Boundary Waters. His most recent trip was 2 weeks in Japan with his family just weeks before he passed.

John worked in home remodeling and home inspections for most of his career, most recently leading the Healthy Homes federal lead abatement program for the City of Minneapolis.

John's greatest love was spending time with his family. His sons David (28) and James (18) have many great memories of spending time with their dad, watching the Vikings, grilling on the deck, and of course traveling. His nieces also remember lots of good times with him at the cabin and many family birthday parties.

John is survived by his beloved wife Dolly Ragudo Lilja, sons David Lilja and James Lilja, mother Dorothy Lilja, sister Emily Lilja Palmer (Larry Birch), nieces Sahro Vedder and Siobhan Palmer, great-niece Zora Rhyns, and many beloved relatives and friends. He was preceded in death by father John Bradford Lilja in 1992.

A memorial celebration will be held at 11:00am on Saturday, August 10th at Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church in Minneapolis. A lunch reception will follow the service. John will be buried at Fort Snelling in a private ceremony. Memorials may be directed to the American Cancer Society or Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Charitable Service Trust.

John's family is deeply grateful to the Veterans Affairs (VA) Hospital staff for caring for John so well through his cancer journey; to his Navy family for the incredible support, and to everyone who has tried to make the heartbreak of

his illness and passing just a little easier.

# Tribute Wall

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“ *Belen lit a candle in memory of John Bradford Lilja, Jr.*



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**Belen** - August 07, 2024 at 09:17 AM