JOHN LATIMER MASON(1923 - 2019)

John Latimer Mason, 95, a much beloved husband, father, grandfather, and influential engineer, passed away peacefully in the company of family on June 3, 2019. John was born on November 8, 1923. Raised in Los Angeles by his parents, Edna Watkins Mason and Zene Upham Mason, from an early age he demonstrated an inquisitive mind, excelled academically, and graduated from Hamilton High School at the age of 15, then entered Cal Tech at the age of 16. John enlisted in the U.S. Air Force at the start of World War II, and, while serving, attained a Bachelor of Science degree in meteorology from the University of Chicago in 1944. During the war, he was stationed in Canada and Alaska as a meteorologist for the Air Force. John returned to Cal Tech after the war, where he received a Bachelor of Science degree in Applied Chemistry (1947), a Master of Science in Chemical Engineering (1948) and PhD in Chemical Engineering (1950). While at Cal Tech, he also received three varsity letters in baseball, which was a lifelong passion, engendered by his father, who took him to Los Angeles Angels' games at the old Wrigley Field in downtown Los Angeles. After graduating from Cal Tech, John met Mary Josephine Schulte, who shared his love of mathematics and science, along with jazz, opera, world travel, card games, and baseball. John and Mary were married on November 26, 1954 and started their family, with children Andrew, Peter, Mary Anne, and John Edward. During their marriage of over fifty years, they often extended their family by offering shelter and support to numerous relatives and others. Generosity was one of John's defining virtues. In 1950, John began a distinguished career in the aircraft and aerospace industry when he was hired as a design engineer by the AiResearch Division of the Garrett Corporation. He quickly rose to prominence within the the company, leading teams in the design of automotive turbochargers, aircraft cooling systems, and, when Garrett was contracted by NASA, the creation of environmental controls for the space capsules in the Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo missions, essential to protect the astronauts. Eventually, John became vice-president of engineering for Garrett, and as the company was absorbed by the Allied Signal Corporation, John's leadership skills allowed him the joy of mentoring many young engineers, which he said meant as much to him as his technical achievements. For over sixty years, the Masons lived in Palos Verdes Estates, where they built two homes and filled them with music, Mary's sculptures, the family cats and dogs, John's eccentric sound systems, basketball hoops, and athletic gear. It was also not uncommon for chalkboards (later whiteboards) to be arranged so that John could instruct the children in mathematical equations and formulas. The Palos Verdes community and South Bay area benefitted from John's intellect, boundless energy, love of sports, and, especially his fondness for children. He coached numerous baseball and softball teams, and even designed and led the building of a Senior Division baseball field on the Peninsula. In addition, he volunteered his time to bring specialized science programs to local schools, helping students understand electricity as well as solar energy. With John's achievements in space exploration, automotive technology, clean energy and engineering research, he became a leader in the international scientific and engineering community. Among his many leadership positions, he was elected as a member of the National Academy of Engineering (NAE), and served two terms as president of the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE). John was also a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences, the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, the American Chemical Society, the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, and was a trustee for the Planetary Science Institute. He was recognized at the White House by President George H.W. Bush for his contributions to the U.S. space program. John was preceded in death by his parents, Edna Watkins Mason and his father, Zene Upham Mason, and by his wife, Mary Schulte Mason. Survivors: His children, Andrew Mason and wife Susan; Peter Mason and wife Roberta Riley; Mary Mason Scott and husband Greg; John Edward Mason and wife Mary, and numerous grandchildren. A memorial service will be held at La Venta Inn, Palos Verdes Estates. In John's memory, donations can be made to the SAE Foundation (www.sae.org/donate).

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