



Mr. Richard Wall

NOV 4, 1944 - DEC 30, 2024



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Richard Dillon (Dick) Wall passed away on December 30, 2024, in Tallahassee, Florida, with his family by his side. He was 80 years old.

He grew up in South Florida and attended St Rose of Lima School, Archbishop Curley Prep, Miami-Dade College, and the University of Miami.

He served on several ships in the United States Navy in the Atlantic and Pacific Fleets, as well as throughout the Mekong Delta during the Vietnam War. After the Navy he returned to Miami and worked as a sports reporter. Following his siren call to the sea, he left the newspaper business and worked as a sailmaker and was general manager of the Miami loft of Hard Sails, and then as a yacht broker managing the sales office of Merrill-Stevens Yachts. For thirty years he was involved in the marine rep and manufacturing business and in the design, building, outfitting, and sailing of one-design and large ocean racing yachts.

At the age of 15 he was chosen to be one of the vice presidents of the International Blue Jay Class Association by Allegra Knapp Mertz, the Association President, and four-time Adams Cup Sailing Champion. At 19 he was named Coconut Grove Sailing Club's Skipper of the Year, and at 20 as captain of his college sailing team he won the U.S. Southeastern Intercollegiate Sailing Championship over seven other teams at Florida State University's Lake Bradford.

He was a long-time and very active member of Miami's Coral Reef Yacht Club, serving multiple terms on the Board of Directors, the Membership Committee, and the Race Committee where he was Race Committee Chairman in 1980-1981. He was also Chairman of the Biscayne Bay Yacht Racing Association, a member of the Columbus Day Regatta Committee, and was Captain of the Biscayne Bay Star Fleet.

For many years Dick sailed as tactician and sail trimmer with his dear friends Wally and Alice Gaffney on all five of their yachts named "Rocinante." In 1972 they won 1st place over 250 boats in the Columbus Day Regatta, and out of 25 races sailed that year they won 21, earning them the boat of the year Ranni Cup. They won the Ranni Cup two more times, in 1978 and again in 1979



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with “Rocinante V,” a custom 28-foot Ron Holland designed Half-Ton Class yacht. Dick’s sailing experiences ranged from dozens of one-design class boats, 5.5 meter boats, CCA boats, MORC boats, many IOR boats, the Half-Ton, Three-Quarter-Ton, One-Ton, and Two-Ton Classes, 12-Meter Yachts, Maxi boats, and his favorite boat, the complex and physically demanding International Star Class. He often compared sailing the 23-foot Star Boat to playing a 20-string violin and considered yacht racing a game of three-dimensional chess where the boards changed shape every 30 seconds.

Among countless races, he sailed on the 67-foot Twelve Meter Class Yacht “American Eagle” in the 1969 Southern Ocean Racing Conference, including winning the prestigious 430-mile St Petersburg to Fort Lauderdale Race. He sailed as tactician and sail trimmer on Don Owler’s yacht “Tonto,” winning the 1973 Block Island Race Week in the 64-boat MORC Class, and in 1975 won the Southern Ocean Racing Conference Ocean Triangle Race in the highly competitive One-Ton Class on the custom 35-foot Craig Walters designed “Rocinante IV.” He was known for his meticulous preparation of hull, rigging and sails, and kept copious notes of the races sailed, including weather, tide, currents, and thoughts for improvement. He mentored dozens of junior sailors through the years, sharing without hesitation his considerable wealth of knowledge and skills. In 1985 he was named Coral Reef Yacht Club’s “Dockwalloper,” awarded for the highest ability in yacht racing on bay and ocean.

In addition to sailing, Dick was also a very experienced alpine mountaineer, climbing for many years in the Swiss, Italian and French Alps, the North Cascades, White Mountains, Sierras, the Rocky Mountains and Scottish Cuillins. He made numerous trips to climb throughout the Alps, summiting many peaks including the Zinalrothorn, Wellenkuppe, Obergabelhorn, Breithorn, Mont Rosa, Liskamm, DuFour Spitze, Dent Blanche, Jungfrau, Monch, Eiger, the Matterhorn and many others. He also climbed Popocatepetl and Orizaba, the high altitude 18,000-foot glaciated volcanic mountains of Mexico’s Sierra Madre Oriental Range. On New Year’s Day in 1988 he climbed New Hampshire’s 6,288-foot Mt Washington in a 50-knot gale of wind and blowing snow. He was also an expert skier, skiing in the Sierras, White Mountains, and the Alps, and competed in cross-country ski races where he reveled in the challenge of finding the perfect wax combination for countless conditions and types of snow.

Dick had a consuming interest in foreign sports cars, owning several high-performance roadsters and GTs over many years, and was a member of the Porsche racing team that won the 24-Hours



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of Daytona in 1977. He often drove his Alfa GTV6 in Time-Speed-Distance rallies along the country roads of central Florida.

In the 1980s he and his late wife, Jo, moved from Miami to Maine, and then to Northern Vermont where for ten years they owned and operated a 135-year old historic country inn specializing in fly fishing, with fly shop, fly fishing school and professional fly fishing guide services. He originated the “Golden Maple” soft hackle wet fly, a coveted pattern widely used in Vermont’s evening Caddis hatch. During his years in Vermont he was very active with his local community, serving as a justice of the peace, a member of the board of listers, as a board member of the Lamoille County Chamber of Commerce, an active member of the Lamoille River Anglers, sang in his church choir and was chief dishwasher at his church’s many fund-raising suppers.

Dick was also an exceptional artist, painting large format, extraordinary landscapes and seascapes in oils and watercolors, in plein air as well as in his studio. He studied with many master painters, and his artwork was known for capturing the moment in a merging of expressionism and realism. His coveted paintings can be found in museums and many private collections. He is also the author of the best-selling “Jonah Wynchester Series” of Vietnam War Novels. The three historic novels, “Jonah’s Cathedral,” “Mekong Covenant,” and “China Sea Anthem,” totaling over 1,050 pages, were written in a contiguous prose-epic style, and are based on his experiences in the Vietnam War.

While in middle-school and high school he sang Gregorian Chant in his church choir, formed a folk singing trio in college, played the guitar and five-string banjo, and loved classical, folk and bluegrass music. He volunteered for many charitable organizations, had a dry wit and boisterous laugh, was known for his honest interest in other people and their life stories, and took great pleasure in being with and taking photos of his grandchildren and Godchildren during their many birthdays, piano recitals, soccer matches, horse shows, regattas, and football and basketball games.

He was preceded in death by his wife of 37-years, Jo Rhodes Wall, his parents, John A. Wall and Louisa M. Wall, and his sister, Monica Wall Beattie. He is survived by his partner, Lynda Jo Gissendanner, his brother-in-law, W. Roger Beattie, nephew, William A. Beattie, niece, Ann L. Beattie Cushman (Charles) of Franklin, NC; stepdaughter, Angela J. Barkley, (Douglas) of Tallahassee; stepsons, J. Kevin Gossett, (Kim) of Clearwater, FL, and David E. Gossett III (Melanie) of Hollywood, FL; six step-grandchildren, Mitch Gossett, Steve Tongel III, Cody Gossett, Morgan



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Barkley, Nathan Barkley and Sierra Gossett; and four Godchildren, Christopher Gaffney, Trevor Gaffney, Charlotte Gaffney, and Virginia Gaffney.

A private memorial service will be held at a later date. Condolences may be sent c/o A.J. Barkley, 11936 Steeds Run, Tallahassee, FL 32317. Donations in Dick's memory may be made to the Wounded Warrior Project, Jacksonville FL. Arrangements by Lifesong Funerals, Quincy, FL.



Tribute Wall

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Alice Gaffney posted:

I first met Richard Wall over 60 years ago. Richard, Wally, and Kinzy Jones had taken on the project of restoring a wooden Blue Jay class boat that a sailing friend had decided to paint on a sunny morning, using his chosen color of house paint, and then launching the still tacky painted boat the same day for a sail. Obviously, the paint job curdled. And the three friends agreed to help out the owner. They thought they would earn a little money. They kept copious notes of hours and materials invested. Richard was the meticulous, detail oriented of the three. The boat was beautiful when finished. And when all was accounted for, the three teenagers had completed the project, earning them less than ten cents an hour. But like everything Richard did throughout his life, the project was accomplished with precision and integrity. Richard was never boastful. He listened, he cared, and gave great attention to detail to everything he did. And he quietly struggled through some of the most challenging parts of his life. When Richard returned to Miami from his Navy service, we thought he had been mostly in San Diego doing security coding type work. But many years later, we were at our favorite Mexican restaurant in Vermont, waiting for our table with Richard and Jo, and he chose that time to share some of his Vietnam experiences with me. He spoke about being on the first vessel to go up the Mekong River, and the terror at night, as the river was not marked, so they had to anchor, and the Viet Cong would release mines to flow down river. The vessel was damaged, and it was a very long run, with steering gear compromised, to travel to the Philippines for shipyard repair. And he told me the story as if we were discussing a regatta on Biscayne Bay or at Block Island Race Week. But the understory, untold, revealed some of the flashbacks he had suffered through. In many ways, this focused, talented, patient (mostly) man in my mind was a true Renaissance man. Everything he started, he accomplished with perfection, from playing and singing folk music, to art, carpentry, writing, story telling, photography, and enjoying the beauty from the sea to the mountain tops. I am so grateful for the friendship and love my family enjoyed. Alice Wright Gaffney

January 10 at 5:27 AM



Memories only last if you share them

Join us in honoring Richard by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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