

John Joseph Garrity



John “Jack” Joseph Garrity, Jr., affectionately known to many as “Mr. Smooth,” was a devoted husband, father, grandfather, soldier, electrical engineer, lifelong learner, and self-described “golf scientist.” He passed away peacefully on September 24, 2026, with Helen, his beloved wife of nearly 45 years, by his side.

Born on December 9, 1936, Jack grew up in Topsfield, Massachusetts, where he developed the curiosity, independence, sense of humor, and mischievous spirit that would remain hallmarks of his personality throughout his life. He carried many fond memories of his childhood in Topsfield, from working summer jobs and picking blueberries to helping groom the Topsfield Fair dog track and spending a summer as a cook’s helper aboard a schooner sailing around Penobscot Bay.

Jack was an avid reader and an insatiable learner from an early age. His siblings remember his nose frequently buried in books or an encyclopedia, and that appetite for knowledge never left him. He possessed a lifelong desire to understand more and to learn a little about everything. When something captured his interest, he pursued it until he knew as much as he could. Even well into retirement, he continued teaching himself new things, delighting in collecting facts, solving problems, and understanding how things worked.

Jack graduated with distinction from the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis as a member of the Class of 1960 and 15th Company, earning a Bachelor of Science in General Engineering. Upon graduation, he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Infantry. He went on to become an Army Ranger and ultimately attained the rank of Major. During his military career, Jack served in Vietnam from 1966 to 1967 as the Senior Battalion Advisor to the South Vietnamese 38th Ranger Battalion.

On January 30, 1967, while serving as a Captain in Vietnam, Jack distinguished himself through extraordinary gallantry in action during a helilift search-and-destroy operation. When his command group came under heavy small-arms fire from a Viet Cong ambush, Jack, with complete disregard for his own safety, charged the enemy position alone, saving the lives of the other members of his command group. For his conspicuous gallantry in action, he was awarded the Silver Star, the United States military’s third-highest decoration for valor in combat.

After his military service, Jack earned a Master of Science degree in Electrical Engineering from Northeastern University in 1970 after declining his acceptance to MIT. When MIT asked him to take an undergraduate course as a refresher because of the time that had passed since his undergraduate studies, Jack characteristically declined. He later admitted that perhaps a little refresher would not have been such a bad idea, a story that perfectly captured both his intellect and his ability to laugh at himself.

In 1976, Jack met Helen, who would become the great love of his life. Born into an Irish Catholic family, Jack had grown up in the Catholic faith, though over the years it had become less central to his life. When Helen converted to Catholicism in the 1980s, her faith deeply inspired Jack and helped bring him back to the Church. He deeply admired the faith she lived and the example she set, and his love and admiration for his wife only deepened through the years.

Jack built a career in the private sector as an electrical engineer and ultimately worked for SAIC. During his career, he moved his family from his Boston-area roots to Northern Virginia in 1986, where he remained until his retirement in 2004.

After retiring, Jack and Helen moved to Fleming Island, Florida, beginning a new chapter of their lives together. Retirement, however, did not mean slowing down for Jack. He devoted much of his time to what he affectionately called “golf science,” creating a system for the local golf community to process scorecards and organize tournaments. His love of golf had followed him throughout his life—so much so that, when given the opportunity to escort President Lyndon Johnson during a visit to Fort Benning in 1967, Jack famously chose to go golfing instead. Decades later, he brought that same enthusiasm for the game together with his characteristic curiosity and persistence, turning his favorite pastime into yet another problem to study, improve, and solve.

Jack also treasured the years spent at the family cottage on Deer Isle, Maine. For many years, and especially during retirement, summers there were a source of enduring happiness. He enjoyed walking the dogs, eating lobster, belting out a fine tune at a hootenanny, and, most of all, being surrounded by family and the beauty of the Maine coast.

Family was at the center of Jack’s life. He was especially proud that all five of his children became college graduates, an achievement he regarded with particular pride given that he grew up in circumstances where a college education was a privilege, not something to be taken for granted. He was grateful for his family and the sense of belonging it provided. As a father, his most important role was to support his children no matter what, and he took enormous pride in the people they became.

Jack was equally proud of his ten grandchildren. Two followed in his footsteps by serving in the Army National Guard, and he delighted in all his grandchildren—their personalities, accomplishments, adventures, and the lives they were building for themselves.

Jack will be remembered for his extraordinary intellect, curiosity, humor, independence, military courage, and ability to find amusement in the world around him. He could turn an ordinary question into a lesson, a golf scorecard into a scientific project, and a family story into something worth telling for generations. He never stopped learning, never lost his fascination with the world around him, and remained deeply proud of and devoted to the family he built and loved.

Jack is survived by his beloved wife of nearly 45 years, Helen; his sons, John (Rosa) Garrity, David (Lisa) Garrity, and William Powell (Eric Candell); his daughters, Carolyn (Ian) Bassett and Teresa (Allen) Buller; his ten beloved grandchildren, Kelly Garrity (fiancé, Dylan Allen), Jesse Bassett (fiancé, Dayi Fu), Meghan Garrity (Jake Harris), Ronoldi and Rosheline Molina, Brendan Garrity, Abby and Ellie Candell, and Miles and Cara Buller; his sisters, Anne Tirrell and Patricia

(Robert) Graffum; as well as many beloved extended family members and dear friends. He was predeceased by his parents, Abbie and James Tirrell, Jr., and his brothers, Robert "Mike" Garrity and James Tirrell III.

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