



John Roark Willis

October 16, 1963 - February 23, 2026

John Roark Willis, 62, passed away on February 23, 2026, in Hospice at Gilchrist in Howard County, Columbia, Maryland, after suffering two strokes. He was carefully and compassionately treated prior to that at University of Maryland Medical Center in Baltimore. Our family extends heartfelt thanks to the doctors, nurses, and staff at both facilities for their dedication, professionalism, and kindness during this difficult time.

John was born on October 16, 1963, in California and was raised in the Rolling Acres community of Cheltenham, Maryland. From an early age, he possessed a deeply analytical mind and a scientific curiosity that stayed with him throughout his life.

He first attended the University of Maryland, where he pursued undergraduate studies in Anthropology with an emphasis in Medical Anthropology and Cultural Geography. He later continued his undergraduate studies in Computer Engineering, focusing on C/C++ programming and Operating System design. His academic path reflected both his fascination with human systems and his deep understanding of technical ones.

John spent the majority of his professional career as a Senior Analyst with RadixII, Inc. in Oxon Hill, Maryland. He was respected for his intelligence, precision, and depth of knowledge.

An avid sailor and lifelong computer enthusiast, John was scientific, thoughtful, and exceptionally smart. He dedicated a meaningful portion of his life to caring for his longtime friend, David Doyle, and in recent years helped care for his parents while they resided in a nursing home. He showed up for the people he loved — steadily and without recognition.

John is survived by his father, Linwood Francis Willis; his mother, Ina Patricia Willis; his sister, Ina Michelle Willis Shaffer; his brother-in-law, Robert William Shaffer; his niece, Ashley Noel Shaffer Rhodes; his nephew, Robert Willis Shaffer; his great-nieces, Arayla Michelle Rhodes, Rory Grace Rhodes, and Aspen May Shaffer; and by many aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Due to his parents residing in a nursing home in North Carolina, a Celebration of Life may be held at a later date near his home in La Plata, Maryland.

John will be remembered for his sharp intellect, his steady presence, and the quiet loyalty that defined his life.

For those who wish to honor John's memory, memorial contributions may be made in his name to The Stroke Foundation (www.thestrokefoundation.org) or to the Alzheimer's Association (www.alz.org), in recognition of the health challenges that touched our family."

Tribute Wall

DK

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



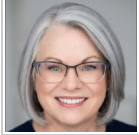
D Knox - March 09 at 07:47 PM

DK

“ 19 files added to the album JRW-Knox-Fun-Times



D Knox - March 09 at 07:42 PM



“ *As John’s sister, I have so many memories that keep popping into my head.*



I remember the quiet times of us just sitting together watching TV — usually Sci-Fi, or his favorite growing up, Hogan’s Heroes, which he knew I absolutely hated.

Then there were the many car rides we took with our parents, when he would torture me with the rubber and silicone dismembered hand called “Thing” that he found at South of the Border in South Carolina. He thought it was hilarious — I did not.

One of my earliest memories of him was when he was around nine or ten, proudly wearing a Spock shirt our mother had made for him. He had a little magnifying glass and a pile of white powder he was experimenting with, trying to make it burn like a laser and wishing he had a ruby rod so he could build one. Even then he was curious, analytical, and fascinated with how the world worked.

And I will never forget the day lightning struck our house in Rolling Acres in Cheltenham, Maryland. A literal ball of lightning appeared and exploded near us. My friends Karen and Susie and I were terrified, but John stepped in and helped get us out safely.

We didn’t always get along growing up — most siblings don’t — but I always knew he was there for me, just as I would always be there for him.

I hope that somehow he knows I was there with him in those final days, and how deeply he was loved.

Michelle Shaffer - March 04 at 04:13 AM

PD

“ John and my son were best friends from age 10 living in Rolling Acres and attending Mattaponi Elementary School. Then on to Gwynn Park Jr and Sr High school then to UMBC. As youngsters they used to run every evening with our dog River. John, always so willing to help with David's paper route (I hope David paid him). The greatest help to David and me by knowing his medical background after David's accident. He researched ever medicine and new treatments bringing it all before his Neuropsychologist and together always a plan or new medicine to try. We will miss his output and Hope David can remain healthy. So thankful for this hard working man.

Pollyann Doyle - March 02 at 10:38 PM

EC

“ John was such a wonderful person with a true heart of gold ❤️ we are going to miss you my friend prayers and hugs to the family I am so very sorry for your loss



Esmeralda cline - March 02 at 10:14 PM