



## Ronald Aqua

January 23, 1947 - January 2, 2021

Ronald Aqua, 73, passed away peacefully in his home in Austin on January 2, 2021. Ron left us after a bout with colon cancer, during which he never lost his positive spirit and sense of determination of a life well-lived.

Ron was born in 1947 in Philadelphia, PA and grew up in the Catskills village of Monticello. He developed his bonds with the local community at the Aqua drugstore, a gathering spot for both locals and visitors alike.

A talented thinker & writer from a young age, Ron's insatiable thirst for knowledge and gift for words developed early and stood the test of time across a variety of academic, business, and advisory positions. After earning valedictorian in the Monticello High School class of 1965, Ron went on to earn his BA in Political Science at Hamilton College in 1969, and a PhD in Government from Cornell University in 1979.

It was during this time where Ron built his legacy as adventurous traveler with a lifelong thirst for other cultures and a global perspective. At Hamilton, he spent his Junior year abroad in Sweden, where amongst other things he spent time exploring European culture, moonlighting as a ski instructor, and laying the groundwork for what would help explain where he developed his strangely particular enthusiasm for Volvos and Scandinavian furniture.

Upon graduation from Hamilton in 1969, he joined the Peace Corps and found himself teaching English in Seosan, a small town on the coast of South Korea. It was here where a local teacher in his school named Maeja Yoon caught his eye and cast the first of many spells over Ron, becoming the love of his life and his devoted partner for 47 years.

Ron always had a talent for communicating around the world – in addition to attaining fluency in Korean during his time in the Peace Corps, he also achieved fluency in Japanese as part of his subsequent PhD studies, including a couple of years living in Tokyo to perform his dissertation research. For anyone who has wondered how he built his massive book collection of obscure titles about East Asian politics in the 1970s, this is where and when the magic happened!

Upon moving to Brooklyn, NY in 1979, Ron combined his love of global affairs and talent as a scholar and began his varied career, first at the Social Science Research Council and then at the US Japan Foundation until 1996.

Following 2 years at Mississippi State University, Ron and Maeja settled in Austin, Texas in 1998, where they remained for the rest of their days, and where Ron finished his career as President of the Texas International Education Consortium (TIEC). During this time, Ron became fond of Texas life, creating roots in a community that embraced his unique East Coast spirit and trademark Jewish wit. He considered himself both a New Yorker and a Texan, as always finding personal pleasure in bringing together different cultures, ideas, and people in a wonderful mixed blend of humanity.

In spite of the academic and professional achievements, there was no greater joy for Ron than spending time with his family. His unconditional love for his family was unparalleled – there was nothing he wouldn't drop to prioritize something for a loved one. In recent years, his caring for Maeja as she

developed dementia was an inspiration and example for anyone who has ever known the meaning of devotion to a partner. He will always be remembered as someone who cared for those close to him above all else, and who left a unique mark on everyone around him. He was kind, funny, smart, and more than anything, relentlessly committed to the “family experience” – quality time with his tribe.

Ron is preceded in death by his beloved wife Maeja Aqua, his sister Linda Strobel, and his father and mother, John Aqua and Helen Streifer. He is survived by his two sons, Sam and Ben Aqua, Sam’s wife Adriana Aqua, Ben’s husband John Aqua, and Ron’s adoring 3 grandchildren, Gabriella, Isabel, and Timothy Aqua.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made in Ron’s honor to The Association For Frontotemporal Degeneration ([www.theaftd.org](http://www.theaftd.org)).

# Previous Events

## Computer Accessible Graveside Service

JAN 5. 3:00 PM (CT)

Austin Natural Funerals Facebook Page  
<http://facebook.com/austinnaturalfunerals>

# Tribute Wall



“ *Austin Natural Funerals created a Ronald Aqua Funeral in memory of Ronald Aqua* ”



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**Austin Natural Funerals** - January 05, 2021 at 07:38 PM



“ *Ronald Aqua* ”

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October 14, 2022 at 12:02 PM

BK

“ It was the Thanksgiving day of 1976, me Ron’s sister Linda who I was married to& their dad Jack arrived in Ron’s apartment. Ron and Maeja were living in this beautiful garden apartment in First street near Prospect Park, Brooklyn NY.

There I also met Ron’s friend an attorney and his Japanese wife who had recently visited Nepal.

Ron roasted a delicious turkey & the ladies prepared various sides while I volunteered on cleaning.

I spent a very memorable day in a company of such great couple.

Ron’s wits and humors with ever present smile and calming presence of Maeja.

I had no idea about the passing of Ron and Maeja until last week.

Thank you Ron and Maeja both for such joyous memories. Even today I think often think about both of you, especially during the Thanksgiving.

May both of you rest in eternal peace in heaven. God bless your kind soul 🙏🙏🙏

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**Bhupendra Khatri** - April 06, 2022 at 10:28 AM

DC

“ In yesterday's mail, exactly one day after the first anniversary of Ron's passing, the USPS returned the holiday card I sent to him a few weeks ago. A sense of foreboding, even though I was unaware that Ron was fighting cancer, led me to the internet, where my worst fear was confirmed. In the fall of 1967 Ron and I, both upstate New Yorkers (he from Monticello and I from Johnstown) and college juniors (he at Hamilton and I at Dartmouth), found ourselves assigned by the Institute for English Speaking Students at the University of Stockholm as roommates, sharing for the academic year the spare bedroom in the apartment of Lilly and Johannes Hansson on the 5th floor of a building within easy walking distance of our classes. I couldn't have chosen a better roommate than the program chose, probably randomly, for me. Enough of our interests and traits overlapped that we had lots in common, and enough were different that we found each other interesting. Above all, Ron was kind, considerate and loads of fun to be around; I couldn't begin to count the laughs we had. My most enduring memory of our rooming experience involves the Hanssons' cat, Buddha, who, for reasons known only to Buddha himself, found Ron's shoes to be his cat boxes of choice. While Ron was certainly not pleased with Buddha, he never failed to see the humor in the situation and, miraculously, tolerated the cat for the duration. Buddha must have sensed that I probably wouldn't have been nearly so tolerant and ignored me completely. Since returning stateside from Stockholm, I don't think Ron and I ever connected in person again, but we corresponded with lengthy notes and photos every holiday season, keeping track of our respective family and vocational developments and pursuits. I extend to Sam, Ben and their families - and to Ron and Maeja's many friends - my deepest condolences. Ron was a special guy and I was lucky to have known him!

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David Cross - January 04, 2022 at 04:27 PM

MC

“ I only knew Ronnie from High School my senior year but got to know him through the Reunions -loved his compassion and sense of humor - he will be missed by everyone he and his wife touched - so sorry for your loss Maryjean Carroll

Maryjean Carroll - January 16, 2021 at 06:07 PM

SR

I want to say how sorry of the death of Ron . my name is Susan Rubin.

Susan Rubin - March 14, 2021 at 03:23 PM

KF

“ Sending my love and fond memories of Ron & Maeja, with sympathies and warm thoughts.

Ken Field - January 08, 2021 at 04:31 PM

MS

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Marie Strobel - January 07, 2021 at 09:29 PM

MS

A cowboy and his posse 2017!

Marie Strobel - January 07, 2021 at 09:31 PM

AC

“ I met Ron in 1974 in Tokyo where we were both doing research for PhDs in government. While we did have some good discussions of Japanese politics, what I remember best are the evenings we spent with our wives, Louise and Maeja, exploring different neighborhoods and their sushi and sake shop and enjoying Ron's joyful sense of humor. We then capped the year off with a midnight trip, along with millions of others, to the Meiji Jingu shrine for a traditional Japanese New Year's Eve.

After returning to America we both found ourselves working in New York City so were able to maintain the friendship, dining together in exotic Brooklyn and then enjoying Ron and Maeja's hospitality at their Poconos retreat--chatting together into the night while our kids watched the bears forage for food in the back yard.

Knowing Ron and Maeja was one of the joys of our lives.

Allan & Louise Campbell

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**ALLAN CAMPBELL** - January 05, 2021 at 03:44 PM



“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



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**Risa Aqua** - January 05, 2021 at 02:00 PM



Ronnie and Maeja were the loveliest people imaginable--fun to be with, energetic, and unstinting in their love and support of family and friends. We have fond memories of their visits to Denver and our one visit to Austin. We miss them both. --Risa and Hal

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**Risa Aqua** - January 05, 2021 at 02:05 PM

MA

“ 7 files added to the album Memories Album



mark - January 05, 2021 at 01:38 PM

AW

“ I remember Ron well and my condolences go to his family and friends. My mother and his mother were friends in school in Monticello as was my wife with his sister Linda. Unfortunately both his mother and sister died of breast cancer too young I was in Monti High's concert band with Ron. I saw him at several reunions of our high school class and we both compared how often and how many different places we had moved to for our jobs in our individual careers. Ron was a smart man and a very friendly guy He had a sense of humor and I remember him wearing a funny Texas hillbilly type hat at one of the reunions held at Mr Willy's I thought it was touching that having met his wife while serving as a member of the peace corps he introduced her as his "peace bride" This picture shows his ready smile Alfred Wells Jacksonville Fla

Alfred Wells - January 05, 2021 at 09:10 AM

JG

“ 2020 was a terrible year; 2021 is supposed to be better, but this is not a good start.

*I last saw Ron at one of our reunions. I immediately recognized him, but he had no idea who I was because my mother (my she rest in peace) always forced crewcuts on me, but now my hair is shoulder length, plus a beard.*

*So many memories, but I'll share a few. There was the Key Club convention at Grossingers in which we were the host club. You were the overall director; I was the program chairman. Did we ever have a blast at that! Then there was Senior Star. Amazing how physics could actually be interesting without Mr. Bremenstuhl.*

*One last memory--I looked at our yearbook and you got a scholastic M as a junior, no big surprise. I also earned one. There were for the top two at the time, and there were two to be given out. You were probably first, and I don't remember who and I were tied for second. Well I was the odd one out. I was supposed to be given that M later, but never received it. Funny the things you remember so many years later.*

*Oh, and we both applied to Hamilton College. You went there; they sent me a rejection, but I probably would have went to Cornell anyway.*

*What can I say. Rest in Peace. Everyone who ever met you was better for the experience.*

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Jeffrey Gersten - January 05, 2021 at 08:37 AM

BG

“ I grew up in Monticello, NY and have known Ron since Kindergarten. We were friends. Both of us were in band and shared many band trips to regional competitions. Ron was the Editor of the Montie Printz, our high school newspaper. I was the Feature Editor. After high school graduation we all went our separate ways. It was not until our 50th Montie High School Reunion that Ron and I discovered we were Texas neighbors... I am living in San Antonio and Ron in Austin. The years melted away. It was as if we had remained in touch since our graduation in 1965. Ron visited my non-profit organization, TEAMability, and immediately understood the root of my passion. Although she had already begun to suffer the effects of dementia, I had the pleasure of meeting the soul of Maeja, After her passing, Ron spent Christmas with me and my family in San Antonio.  
Ron was a light in our lives and will remain so forever...

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**Barbara Goldman** - January 04, 2021 at 11:50 PM

BG

“ 2 files added to the album Memories Album



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**Barbara Goldman** - January 04, 2021 at 11:29 PM



“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



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**Adriana Urrea-Aqua** - January 03, 2021 at 07:38 PM