

“An army of deer led by a lion is more to be feared than an army of lions led by a deer.” —
Chabrias 410–375 B.C.

Thank you all again for being here so we can connect around the most remarkable man I have ever known and had the privilege of supporting, loving, and bearing witness to his last 30 years. As you all know the last thing Richard would want is to hear a sentimental eulogy from his wife, however, let me state these facts...Richard was the love of my life and my guiding light.....

Richard George Ruggiero, Ph.D. (10 February 1953-10 February 2024) died peacefully at home in Arlington, Virginia surrounded by his wife, his beloved children, and his dog Otis which is what he most wanted following a six-month experience with glioblastoma – a fascinating cancer that broke his beautiful, remarkable brain and mercifully allowed this extraordinary man to finally rest. He was abundantly clear upon his return from his last job in Cameroon (African Wildlife Foundation Faro Landscape Chief 2020-2023) saving yet another national park while risking his life that at home he was the happiest he had been since his childhood. He died happy and grateful and feeling very loved and accomplished.

Richard was born in Paterson, NJ to Patton's 3rd Army WWII Veteran and Paterson Police Sergeant George Louis Ruggiero and Adoring Mother Cecilia Marie Fusco. Being raised in economic hardship in an Italian immigrant family in Paterson featured heavily in Richard's stories and underlying values for hard work, love of family, and love of nature as his parents often left the city taking the family to camp in upstate New York. Upon graduation from Rutgers University as a first-generation college student after ten years of self-funded study and with a degree in Wildlife Biology he embarked upon a 43-year career engaged in African and global wildlife conservation.

He began his wildlife career as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Manovo-Gounda St Floris National Park of Central African Republic (1981-1984); an environmental inspector for state of NJ and teaching assistant at Rutgers University during the time he completed both a Master of Science (lion predation) and Doctor of Philosophy (elephant ecology) (1985-1989) returning to CAR for field work and anti-poaching efforts; Director of the School for Field Studies Kenya Program (1989-1991); Program Manager then Research Director for Wildlife Conservation Society's Nouabalé-Ndoki National Park in Republic of Congo (1991-1996) where he returned in 1997 during a coup attempt to secure the park headquarters and project resources; then a 20-year career with the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Division of International Conservation first managing the African Elephant and Great Ape Conservation Funds as a Wildlife Biologist-International Specialist (1998-2006), Branch Chief Near-East, South Asia, and Africa (2006-2013), and finally as Chief (2013-2018). Words cannot convey all that he accomplished during all those decades to secure the safety of wildlife and people across the globe but his many colleagues can attest to his unique capacity to support, hold accountable, persevere, and find hope in the mission of saving God's creation as the most noble of causes we have as human beings.

Throughout his remarkable career Richard held steadfast to his belief in the need for conservation action that the wildlife could actually feel – knowing as he did that his beloved elephants had consciousness of the genocide that they have been experiencing for decades and that he was witness to and fought against throughout his career. He did not mince words when it came to the apathy and corruption and greed that is the driving force behind the destruction

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of nature on the planet. He was intolerant in his views of risk-averse professionals and politicians who care more for keeping their jobs than actually saving the wildlife they were responsible to help because he repeatedly risked his job, his life, and his relationships throughout his career all to great effect for the elephants and nature he so treasured.

He found his main solace from his life's mission and the 'losing battle of a war worth fighting' of saving wildlife – the 'innocents' he felt he was uniquely tasked to protect – in his sense of humor and the absurd, his love of Classical music and his beloved Yankees, figuring out how to fix everything that broke, feeding everyone his masterful cooking, and his children whom he adored beyond measure. He shared with a colleague welcoming him to the 'parent club' on the new birth of a child, “...Nothing is more important in life. We leave to the world a good person who can do good work and love others. After all, no one reads a CV at a eulogy. It's all about love and loved ones.”

Richard's departure leaves countless colleagues, friends, and family around the globe with the essential task of carrying on his legacy holding ourselves and one another accountable to the future of elephants and nature on the planet. Along with his extensive Ruggiero and Fusco cousins, his Godmother Marie Fusco Pitman, and Eves & Ruggiero nieces and nephews, his Eves & Vaughan in-laws with whom he shared a particular and special bond, his kindred daughter, Phindi Mngomezulu (Richie Atat) & Grandchildren Iniabasi & Imaabasi and core kindred family in Arlington, VA and Africa all of whom he greatly, if quietly, adored– the outrageously private person he was - is survived by five people he uniquely allowed to see and know that he was, in fact and like all of us, vulnerable: his children, Casey Savanna Ruggiero and Ryan Forest Ruggiero, his wife of 30 years whom he met in Kenya and to where they had planned to return together, Dr. Heather Elaine Eves, and his brothers George Ruggiero and Dr. J. Michael Fay. George singularly holds Richard's entire history and has been an essential link to their beloved parents, family, many colleagues, and children and is the person Richard spoke with at length daily over many years keeping them both balanced and sustained.

Among Richard's most treasured colleagues and friends was Stefanie Powers, President and Founder of the William Holden Wildlife Foundation who was responsible for connecting him to his wife Heather who was working at the foundation's education center in Nanyuki, Kenya when they first met in 1990. Throughout their marriage Richard and Heather were able to spend time with Stefanie addressing important wildlife challenges of the day, supporting the work of the foundation, and enjoying delightful meals and conversations together. Stefanie was one of the few people Richard allowed Heather to share the news of his diagnosis and she was steadfast in her support throughout his illness being among the first to reach out to the children to meet with them directly in the wake of losing their beloved father. With Stefanie's enormous shared love of and dedication to elephants and Africa, his wife, and his children we are discussing the establishment of the Richard G. Ruggiero Memorial Fund for Savanna and Forest Elephants – RGR-SAFE Fund -- to be housed within the WHWF. In the establishment of this memorial Richard will continue to be a guiding light long into the future for all who are affected by this work. This will be an endowed fund that his treasured children will participate in managing to specifically support conservation efforts that African elephants can feel. There is no more fitting tribute to Richard's enormous efforts, sacrifices, and values than such a legacy fund. [In lieu of flowers, please send one time donations to The William Holden Wildlife Foundation: In Memory of Dr. Richard G. Ruggiero: <https://whwf.org/donate/>]