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Dr. Azmi Shafiq Jarrah

March 12, 1933 - Dec. 4, 2018

Dr. Azmi Shafiq Jarrah, beloved pediatrician, father and husband, died peacefully on Tuesday, December 4, 2018. He was 85 years old. Azmi was born in Acre, Palestine, on March 12, 1933, to school principal Shafiq and Samiha Jarrah. From the age of 5, he knew he wanted to become a physician, and worked diligently towards this goal. He excelled in academics and running, winning a gold watch in a particular race. In 1948, that gold watch and most of the family's belongings were left behind when the Jarrahs were forced to flee from Acre as bullets were shot into their home during the fight for Palestine. They never returned to Acre or Palestine to live.

As refugees, the Jarrah family struggled to make ends meet, but Azmi never lost sight of his goal. He ultimately graduated high school in two years, moving from last in the class to first. He taught English in a Christian missionary school for Muslim Palestinian refugee children, where his father had become principal. Unable to afford college, and pretending to be 20 instead of 18 years old, he worked in Saudi Arabia teaching English, earning enough money to attend the prestigious American University of Beirut. He earned a full scholarship to AUB's medical school. AUB held a special place in Azmi's heart, where he met friends and mentors who he would treasure throughout his life. Azmi is listed among the distinguished graduates of this university.

It was during this time that Azmi cultivated his tastes for travel and social justice. He recalled with great fondness his days of hitchhiking throughout Europe and the Middle East, working with the newly established Peace Corps, and touring Pete Seager, famed folk musician, around refugee camps in Lebanon. He also started a

life-long love affair with American Folk Music, becoming a devotee of The Kingston Trio, Peter Paul and Mary, and of course, Pete Seager.

In 1965, Azmi came to the United States as a pediatrics resident at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He loved telling stories about trying to find his Volkswagon Beetle buried in snow. He then went on to complete a fellowship in pediatric nephrology at Children's Hospital Oakland, in California. He never would answer questions about living in the Bay Area in the 1960s, responding instead with a knowing smile.

He returned to Saudi Arabia to work in the Aramco Oil Base in Dhahran. There, he met Maha Bachour, a pediatrics resident from Safita, Syria. As he noted, "At first we were friends, then we were more than friends." They were married in Lebanon in 1969. They moved to Tripoli, Libya, to establish the pediatric ward of a new hospital, but, shortly after arriving, Muammar Gaddafi came to power. Forced to leave, Azmi and Maha emigrated to Morganton, North Carolina, to become physicians at the Western Carolina Center (now J. Iverson Riddle Developmental Center). He served as primary physician to residents of Hemlock and Pine Cottages. In 1972, he opened his private practice, where over the years he cared for thousands of the community's children. He was often known to not charge patients who were unable to pay for his services.

He became an active member of the community, serving as chairman of the Chamber Music Society, a member of the board of the Community House, and founding and serving as president of the board of The Children's School (now Morganton Day School). He gave talks about the Palestine-Israel conflict, and coached youth soccer. He completed the Cooper River Bridge Run several times, once placing in the top three for his age group.

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After his retirement in 2000, he became a regular, if not elegant, presence on the golf course at Mimosa Hills Country Club. He loved playing tennis with his tennis buddies twice a week, reveling in the ribbing as much as in the actual game.

Azmi is survived by his wife of nearly 50 years, Maha; his sister, Aida Jarrah Hassan; two daughters, Rima Joy Jarrah (Robert Beaumont), and Hania Jarrah Poole (Jay);

and his grandchildren, Georgette Elizabeth Beaumont, Sophie Christine Poole, Jack Alexander Poole, and Robert Jarrah Beaumont.

The family would like to thank Grace Ridge Retirement Community, especially the dedicated and staff of the memory care unit. Thank you for treating Azmi with your love and respect.

A memorial service will be held at 2 p.m., Friday, December 7, 2018 in the Colonial Chapel of Sossoman Funeral Home.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to organizations of your choice that support education for children in Burke County. Azmi strongly believed in education, and helped educate not only his own children, but his brother, sister, nephews, nieces, and many children through The Children's School.

Tribute Wall

My children were patients of Dr Jarrah when we lived in Morganton. He was so kind and understanding to the children and their parents. He was truly a friend of our family.

—Dianne Beck Loftin