Donald J. Munro

March 5, 1931 ~ June 4, 2023

Donald J. Munro was born on March 5th, 1931, to Thomas Munro and Lucille Nadler Munro. He grew up in Cleveland, Ohio with his three sisters, Eleanor (Munro Kahn), Cynthia (Beeker), and Elisabeth (Smith), and beloved dog Scamper. Don received a BA from Harvard University and then spent several years in the US Navy. While working in Washington DC he met the love of his life, Ann Patterson. They were married in the Philippines, where he was stationed, in 1956, and began a life of adventure together that lasted 67 years.

Don received a PhD in Philosophy from Columbia University, and spent his career as a Professor of Philosophy and Chinese at the University of Michigan. He focused on the origins of ideas of human nature in Chinese philosophical traditions. His work was unusual in his desire to expand traditional philosophical approaches through an openness to perspectives from social and natural sciences. Don was invited to be part of the academic exchanges that deepened connections between China and the West in the late 1970s and 1980s. He taught at Peking University and The Chinese University of Hong Kong, and he was appointed as a visiting scholar at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing. He received a Guggenheim Fellowship and served on the American Council of Learned Societies. His many books and articles were highly regarded by both Chinese and Western scholars. After he retired from teaching he and Ann endowed the Tang Junyi Professorship at the University of Michigan to bridge Philosophy and Chinese Studies. He was beloved by his students and cared deeply about them. He was a model scholar, a ‘master teacher’ who embodied the principles and insights he sought to transmit. He formed lifelong friendships with many of his students and had a deep impact on the next generation of China scholars.

Don was endlessly curious about the world and could predictably be found stretched out on the couch reading, with a cat on his belly. He loved books about WWII, science, evolution, history, travel, nature, and beyond. He reveled in conversations about what he was reading and loved to exchange ideas with friends, colleagues and family. He traveled the world with Ann, and brought back new ideas and stories to share from across the globe.

He also loved walking in the woods, especially the woods of northern Michigan. Those who were lucky enough to be part of his world were invited to help Don and Ann build a log cabin (Canta Rana), from scratch, on their property on the Leelanau Peninsula. These friends share wonderful summer memories of hammering, building, jumping in the pond and swimming in Lake Michigan. Don was steadfast and loyal, clear with wisdom and encouragement for those around him. He told wonderful stories, and brought laughter and silly jokes to every gathering.

Above all, Don loved his family. He and Ann were the air each other breathed. Ann and their daughter, Sarah (Munro Holzner), were the center of his world. He loved them beyond measure, and with them his sisters and many nephews and nieces, his son-in-law Claudio Holzner, and grandsons Powell and Nicolas. When his grandsons were young they formed a trio called the ‘Magical Tricksters’ and performed magic shows for friends and neighbors, and preschool classes, whom they amazed with disappearing coins, chopped off fingers, and tales of the magical powers of the Monkey King. He brought so much love and joy, and deep kindness, to all of us. We will miss him forever.

He is preceded in death by his sister, Eleanor Munro Kahn, and nephew, Alexander (Lexi) Frankfurter.