



## Dr. James M. Riekse, Sr.

December 13, 1919 - April 8, 2014

Dr. James Martin Riekse, aged 94, died on the 8th of April at Blodgett Hospital, with his beloved wife, children and grandchildren by his side. He was a remarkable man, husband, father, grandfather and physician, who never stopped learning and growing and who could still give a contestant on Jeopardy a run for his money even a week before his death.

He was a prominent obstetrician and gynecologist at Butterworth Hospital where he practiced from 1950 to 1988, delivering over 7,200 babies; it's likely that almost everyone in town knows someone he delivered. He served as Chief of Staff of Butterworth from 1985 to 1987, Chairman of the OB-GYN Department from 1961 to 1965, and the President of West Michigan OB-GYN from 1970 to 1988. Dedicated to women's health, he helped found Planned Parenthood of Kent County and served as its Medical Director from 1965 to 1972. While still practicing, Jim became frustrated with the fact that west Michigan doctors were having to borrow money to pay their malpractice insurance premiums and came up with the idea of creating the Michigan Professional Insurance Exchange, originally an organization jointly owned by Butterworth Hospital and participating doctors which has since expanded to include much of the western Michigan medical community. He served as the Exchange's medical director from 1988 to 2000.

Working always with quiet effectiveness, Jim contributed to the community in

ways almost too numerous to name. During the turbulent 1960s, he served on the Grand Rapids Human Relations Commission, helping to foster improved race relations in the community. He put his beliefs into practice as a founder and board member of Neighborhood Health Services, which delivered free health care to the poor. He helped to organize and served on the board of Park School, an educational program for pregnant teenagers run by the Board of Education and housed at facilities of the Salvation Army. He was a member of the Mayor's Committee of 100, a group organized to plan for the future of the city of Grand Rapids and to find solutions to existing problems. He also served as a member of the Planning Committee for the United Way of Kent County.

Jim would never have been able to afford to attend college and medical school if it weren't for the generosity of an older physician and mentor who loaned him the necessary funds. Having been helped in this way made him sensitive to the needs of others and adamant about the importance of education in our society. He put these values into practice in many ways, including helping several other medical students to achieve their goals and acting as an Associate Clinical Professor at the Michigan State University College of Human Medicine.

Jim was born in Grand Rapids on December 13, 1919 to Henry and Lucretia Riekse, both children of Dutch immigrants. His early life was greatly shaped by the Depression, when his family lost their house and he needed to help make ends meet by selling wood with his father and delivering meat and Liberty Magazines starting at age 11. He had a beautiful singing voice and could earn an extra 25 cents for every solo he sang during church performances.

Jim was the first member of his family to attend college, and he graduated from Hope College in 1941. Hope College recognized Jim with its

Distinguished Alumni Award in 2000, and has since graduated two of his children and seven of his grandchildren. During his last year at Hope, he was concerned that his dream of attending medical school would be jeopardized by his final exam grade in organic chemistry. To his great relief and the good fortune of the medical community, final exams were cancelled that year due to a visit to Holland by Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands.

Due to the outbreak of World War II, Jim had to complete medical school at the University of Michigan in two and a half years, and immediately upon his graduation received his commission as a Captain in the Medical Corps of the U.S. Army.

While an intern at Butterworth Hospital, he noticed a fetching young nurse by a drinking fountain, and had the good sense to marry Helena Braendle five months later. They celebrated the 69th anniversary of their extraordinary marriage and partnership in January, marking that considerable achievement with the 28 people whose lives they helped to create.

Jim's faith and his church have been the bedrock of his life; he and Helena have been members of Central Reformed Church for over 50 years where Jim served as an Elder and Vice President of the Consistory. Whenever a board or task force was created to address an issue, Jim was on it. Whether contributing to the life of his church, his medical community or the community at large, Jim never cared whether he received credit; he saw needs and he worked tirelessly to meet them. That life improved for those around him was all that mattered.

Jim was preceded in death by his son Jim Riekse, Jr. his son-in-law Jack Zepp, and his brother and sister-in-law Martin and Agnes Riekse. Jim will be lovingly remembered by his wife Helena, children Nancy (John) Norden,

Meredith Riekse, Judith Riekse Marcus, Laurel (Fred) VanDyke, his eight grandchildren, Jim (Julie) Riekse, Jamie (Sean) McWilliams, Andrew (Shanna) Norden, Brad (Heather) Norden, Kate (Troy) DeWys, Tom Hoesch, Karl (Tracey) Hoesch and Leah (Matthew) Brooks, his 15 great-grandchildren, 3 step-grandchildren and step-great grandson, Stephen Van Dyke, Samantha Van Dyke, Lindsay Van Dyke, sister Lucille (Howard) Claus and several nieces and nephews.

A service to honor the faith and life of Dr. James M. Riekse Sr. will be held at 2:00 pm, Saturday, May 24, 2014, at Central Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, 10 College Avenue NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503. The Rev. Timothy Dieffenbach and Dr. George Brown Jr. will officiate. Visitation will be from 12:30pm-2:00pm prior to the service at Central Reformed Church. Those who wish to make memorial contributions are asked to direct them to Heartside Ministries,

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1

2

Next

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54 Division Ave. S, Grand Rapids MI 49503, or Doctors without Borders, P.O  
Box 5030, Hagerstown, MD, 21741-5030.

Yntema Funeral Home, 251 S. State Street, Zeeland, is serving the Riekse  
Family.

[www.yntemafh.com](http://www.yntemafh.com)

Previous

1

2

# Tribute Wall



“ *Dr. James M. Riekse, Sr.*

August 31, 2022 at 01:26 PM



“ *Dad dearest, I so wish R.I.P. meant "Return If Possible"... God bless your soul, Cleo*

**Cleo Ponassi - West Palm Beach, FL** - February 18, 2015 at 12:00 AM



“ *We send our sympathies to the family of Dr. Riekse. He delivered me in November, 1958 and was also my obstetrician in 1982 when my husband and I were expecting our first child. Unfortunately he did not deliver her because he was at a Notre Dame game that weekend. I remember him as a kind and compassionate physician. I had no idea that for many years my husband benefited from one of his important achievements. My husband is an emergency physician and the Michigan Professional Insurance Exchange was his malpractice provider. He certainly impacted many lives through his varied achievements in the medical community, his family, his church and the community where he lived!*

**Sally Coté - Holland, MI - patient** - April 27, 2014 at 12:00 AM



“ *Helena, we so enjoyed our dinner with you recently and mourn with you the loss of Dr. Riekse. The two of you gave so much to so many, well beyond the norm and your immediate family. His commitment to the health and well being of women through Planned Parenthood is a legacy that lives on.*

**Ruth Kelly - Grand Rapids, MI** - April 21, 2014 at 12:00 AM

MC

“ *Our condolences to the family. Memories of Jim will be fondly remembered. As my doctor, Jim was always there for me. He will be sadly missed.*

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**Marcia and Bob Cross - San Diego, CA** - April 21, 2014 at 12:00 AM

RM

“ *May the love of friends and family carry you through your grief.*

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**Ron VanderKolk - Caledonia, MI** - April 21, 2014 at 12:00 AM

YP

“ *Dear Helena and Family:*

*Our thoughts and prayers are with you and your Family.*

*May precious memories comfort all of you at this sad time.*

*Dr. Riekse will be missed!*

*Take care.*

*With Love and Sympathy,*

*Your Friends at West Michigan OB-GYN PC*

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**Your Friends at West Michigan OB-GYN PC - Grand Rapids, MI - West MI OB GYN PC Past President** - April 20, 2014 at 12:00 AM

DM

“ *As I mourn his passing, I rejoice in the life he lives and those he blessed . . .*

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**Dave Medema - Rockford, MI** - April 20, 2014 at 12:00 AM

AF

“ Robert Humphrey would like to express his sympathy to Helena and wanted to send her a card, but couldn't find her address. Helena has been a good friend to the Humphrey family for many many years. Sorry to hear about Jim.

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**A friend** - April 17, 2014 at 12:00 AM

JF

“ Helena, I was so sorry to learn of your losing your lifelong best friend ,having to be separated from you for a short while. But what a blessing that in your grief you can have the assurance that he is spending his Eternal life in the presence of our Heavenly Father and the angels because of what Jesus did, and you'll be together again. Reading about his life revealed how humble he was as he served his family, his church and community, and others. Just incredible I think of you often and the happy times at the cottage that you were a part of for us, after Mother, who loved you as family, passed away. I am sad that the distance and teaching prevents me from being there. I called Ken, and Keith and his wife in Hawaii also. Some of our best memories are those that you made possible. With affection & sorrow, comfort also for Nancy, Laurel, Judith and Meredith, Joan

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**Joan Applegate Chorney - Greenwood Village (Denver), CO - former neighbor, family friend** - April 16, 2014 at 12:00 AM

AF

“ Dr. Riekse will always be remembered by me...I was one of his first patients and he delivered all 4 of my babies while saying, "Another miracle!" His warmth and caring spirit will never be forgotten. My sympathy to his family. Carol Ryman VandenBerg

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**A friend** - April 16, 2014 at 12:00 AM