



**Ralph Ballou Colby** died at the San Francisco VA Hospital on Wed, April 22, 2026. He was 87 years old.

Colby was born in Winthrop, MA in 1938 to Jeannie Ballou Colby and Eben Thompson Colby. His father taught physics and history at Winthrop High School. His mother also worked in the school system and later as a bank teller. He graduated from Winthrop High School in 1956, where he was active in gymnastics. As a teenager, he was one of the youngest ham radio operators in the country. From an early age, Colby's lifelong ambition was to be a pilot.

Colby graduated from Tufts University in 1959, where he received a BS in Electrical Engineering. He was enrolled in Reserved Officers Training Corp (ROTC) and was a member of the Sigma Nu fraternity. He married Sandra Simoni (now Sas Colby) in 1959 and began pilot training with the US Air Force in 1960. Daughters Alison Colby and Laura Colby were born in 1960 and 1961, respectively.

Colby was stationed at Otis Air Force Base in Cape Cod in 1961 where he flew 13-hour surveillance missions

on Constellations ("Connie's"). He was deployed to Vietnam 1964-1965, where he flew L-19's as a forward air controller, and was awarded a Bronze Star for bravery. After returning home, he served as an Air Force Instructor Pilot in Fort Walton Beach, FL, resigning his commission in 1966. The same year he took a job as a pilot with United Airlines, flying Boeing 727's and later 747's. He flew for United for 35 years.

Colby resided with his family in Ridgefield, CT from 1968 - 1975. During this time he worked at Mason Engineering and became involved with making slide shows from his photography. He and Sas were divorced in 1975. He married Nancy Lytle in 1976 and moved to San Francisco in 1977. Colby and Lytle founded Minds Eye Productions, an audio-visual company creating slide shows at the forefront of multi-media and projection at the time. They were active members of the Association for Multi Image (AMI). Their projection work was installed throughout the US and Italy. Colby and Lytle divorced in 2000.

Colby retired from United Airlines in 2001. During his retirement, he returned to school, studying information technology at San Francisco City College. He also discovered social dance. Swing was his favorite. Colby became a regular dancer at Lindy in the Park and the Verdi Club. He was a lifelong lover of jazz music. He liked to sport a red pork pie hat, often accompanied by a red nose, and sometimes a bouncing ball. He was an active participant at the AA Gratitude Center and toured in the AA play "Our Experience" throughout the AA community.

Colby is survived by his sister, Dot Young (Concord, NH); first wife, Sas Colby (Berkeley, CA); daughters Alison Colby (NY, NY) and Laura Colby (Brooklyn, NY); his stepdaughter Vanessa Jaquish (Minneapolis, MN) and stepson Seth Jaquish (San Francisco, CA); and his grandson Colby Eben Marple (Norwalk, CT). Donations can be made in Colby's memory by check to: the Gratitude Center, 1320 7th Ave, SF, CA 94122 or via Venmo @SFGratitudeCenter; KPFA (kpfa.org); and Democracy Now! (democracynow.org). Plans for a memorial are forthcoming.

Ralph requested that this poem  
be read aloud after he died.

## High Flight

Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of Earth  
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;  
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth  
of sun-split clouds, — and done a hundred things  
You have not dreamed of — wheeled and soared and  
swung  
High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there,  
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung  
My eager craft through footless halls of air...

Up, up the long, delirious, burning blue  
I've topped the wind-swept heights with easy grace.  
Where never lark, or even eagle flew —  
And, while with silent, lifting mind I've trod  
The high untrespassed sanctity of space,  
—Put out my hand, and touched the face of God.

John Gillespie Magee Jr.