

1st Lieutenant (Ret Med) Douglas J. Strauss was born and raised in El Segundo, California. A shy yet formidable individual, he excelled in academics (especially math, where he achieved a perfect score on the math SAT) and football in high school. He was recruited by several Division 1 schools to play college football but turned down those offers to accept an appointment and play football at the United States Air Force Academy. He dropped out of the collegiate football program his sophomore year but continued to play on the intramural football level, eventually leading 8th Squadron to the Wing Intramural Football Championship his senior year. After graduation in June 1973, he attended Undergraduate Navigation Training (UNT) at Mather AFB, Sacramento, California. Doug continued his prowess in sports, leading his UNT squadron flag football team to the 1973 Base Champions, playing rugby for a local Sacramento team, and skiing at Lake Tahoe.

Upon graduation from UNT in 1974, Doug completed follow-on training at Little Rock AFB, Arkansas, before moving on to his first operational assignment at Clark AFB, Philippines, as a C-130 navigator. He married Marceen (Sam) Pedro on March 22, 1975 in Austin, Texas. Their love story began in Hawaii in 1971, when Doug, while on an 8th Cadet Squadron sponsors' trip, met Sam who was celebrating her high school graduation. After their wedding, they began life in the Philippines, where Doug was stationed. Their life together was full of unwavering love, devotion, and tragedy and was an inspiration to anyone fortunate enough to know them. During an annual flight physical, Doug was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS) and was medically retired from the Air Force in 1977. Upon leaving the AF, he and Sam moved to Palm Springs, California, where Doug started an energy consulting business in his home. MS is not necessarily debilitating but it affected Doug almost immediately after his diagnosis. First his eyesight started faltering, and within five years he was wheelchair bound. Undeterred by his disease and determined to pursue life with zest, he worked with the help of Sam, until he could no longer sit up in his wheelchair. Sam was Doug's main caregiver and consultant. They made decisions as a couple their entire life together even when Doug was only able to blink.

Despite Doug's deteriorating condition, he and Sam continued to live a full life. When not by his side, Sam pursued a life as a schoolteacher and scuba instructor and trained as a private pilot. They decided not to have children. Work permitting, they traveled by car to Texas to visit Sam's family and to California to enjoy some of Doug's childhood haunts. They also raised five dogs. The dogs became Doug's only other love in life, standing watch over him during the day and keeping a vigil over him at night.

Sam's life tragically ended on June 8, 1991 when she, a girlfriend pilot, and a student of hers took off from Palm Springs, hoping to be the last people to arrive and leave a nearby airport before it closed. The Cessna they were flying stalled after take-off and all were killed. Doug was devastated by the loss of his beloved wife, best friend, and care giver. He remained at his home in Palm Springs under the care of round the clock nurses until his passing on October 8, 1993. Throughout his struggle, his personality and indomitable spirit of life were reflected in his smile and in his eyes. He and Sam are deeply missed by family and 8th Cadet Squadron

mates alike. Doug's legacy lives on through the youngest son of Heidi and Denny Merideth (classmate of Doug's) who they named Kristopher "Douglas" Merideth. Sam and Doug were cremated, and their ashes were spread in the Pacific Ocean off San Pedro, one of Sam's favorite scuba diving sites.

