



Walter James Nguyen

August 16, 1955 - July 22, 2026

San Jose, California

Walter James Nguyen died in San Jose on July 22, 2026. He was seventy. Born there on August 16, 1955, to parents who had come from Vietnam by way of a long patience, he grew up in a valley that still had orchards at the edges and machine shops in the middle. He learned English at school and a second set of manners at the table. He never treated either language as a costume.

He apprenticed in a small shop that made parts no one famous would ever name: brackets, housings, the metal that lets a better-known machine keep its reputation. Later he assembled electronics on a line that moved faster than the paystubs admitted. He was the man who could hear a bad bearing before the gauge did, and the man who brought extra rice for the night shift because he remembered being hungry at nineteen. He did not call himself an engineer. He called himself employed, which he treated as a moral category.

He married Linh Nguyen in 1981, in a church that still used the old parking lot for both weddings and funerals. They bought a house in a neighborhood that later became expensive around them. They stayed. Two daughters went through public schools Walter trusted more than he trusted real-estate talk. He coached a weekend soccer team with a whistle he never learned to blow correctly and a sense of fairness he did. After the shop closed he repaired lawnmowers in the garage and refused to charge a widow what the parts actually cost.

Neighbors remember a quiet man who swept his sidewalk and yours if the wind had been unfair, who kept a coffee can of screws labeled in two languages, and who could sit through a graduation without making it about himself. He liked the valley early, before the heat, when the hills still looked like a place a person could walk. He died in San Jose, the only city he had ever needed. The garage light is off. The work he left in other people's machines is still turning.

Services

A memorial in San Jose with tea and photographs afterward. In lieu of flowers, a gift to a trade program or adult English class is welcome.

NN-OBIT-2026-C007

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