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## Jacob Gelt Dekker – Obituary



Jacob Gelt Dekker, international entrepreneur and philanthropist, passed away peacefully on September 1, 2019, at his home in Key West, Florida after a renewed battle with lymphoma. Jacob was 71. He is survived by John Padget, his lifelong partner, and five family members.

Jaap, as he was known to those closest to him, was born in Oterleek, North Holland on April 22, 1948. Wanderlust gripped him at an early age; he traveled and explored the planet endlessly. He practiced dentistry in Amsterdam after university, and then became an active entrepreneur with a talent for making something out of seemingly nothing.

Together with John Padget, he launched multiple businesses in Europe. Early ventures were in the fitness business, one hour photo developing, car rentals and leasing, cosmetics, brand licensing, and cell phone retailing.

After stepping out of the business world in 1990, he traveled the world extensively, and fell in love with Curacao where he launched a long-term project to renovate the rundown Otrobanda district in Willemstad. The result was the creation of the Hotel Kura Hulanda & Resort, and the anthropological Kura Hulanda Museum which houses extensive exhibits with over 10,000 artifacts documenting the transatlantic slave trade. It is now a UNESCO World Heritage site.

His philanthropic interests focused on advancing schooling and education, primarily for underprivileged students wherever he lived, including Key West.

Over the years, he authored several books, among them, *Het Doel heiligt de Middelen* (*The End justifies the Means*), *Pot met Goud* (*Pot with Gold*), *Persona Non Grata*, and *The Caribbean*.

While seen at times as a controversial figure, he was deeply driven, creative, and tremendously compassionate about the humanity around him. He survived battles with various cancers for more than four decades. He held a Doctorate in Dentistry from the University of Amsterdam, and MBA's from the University of Rochester and the University of Rotterdam. He was the recipient of numerous recognitions, and knighted by the Queen of the Netherlands in the Order of Oranje-Nassau.

His family survivors are: Stijntje "Christyna" Wijdenes (Dekker), Sister, Age 67; Sacha Dekker, Niece, Age 46; Jacco Dekker, Nephew, Age 42; Daniel Wijdenes, Nephew, Age 35; and Henrik Wijdenes, Great Nephew, Age 7.

A private memorial will be held at a later date. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Monroe County Education Foundation, P. O. Box 2561, Key West, Florida 33045.