Jim Clarke passed away peacefully at 7:45 pm, May 31, in the arms of his wife of 47 years, Judith.

Jim was born William James Clarke on January 10, 1942, seven minutes before his twin sister, Susan. They joined an older sister, Sandy, and parents, Bill and Marion Clarke, in Wallingford, Connecticut. Jim loved the time he spent at the family summer home in Madison on the shore of Long Island Sound. When he was older, he had his own wooden boat, Calypso, on which he spent many happy hours and days. Calypso was destroyed in Hurricane Carol in 1954.

Jim attended local elementary schools, and as a teenager, was a student at Choate School in Wallingford. He was diagnosed with Type 1, insulin-dependent diabetes at age 11, a condition which proved a challenge during his entire life. This was before blood testing and disposable syringes for administering insulin, so early on, it was necessary to boil his glass insulin syringe each time it was used, morning and evening, and sharpen the needles that he used. Later, the availability of disposable syringes proved to be a true blessing.

It was at this time of his life that Jim developed a life-long love of math and classical music. With a natural sense and ability for figures, Jim "aced" every math test and assignment, and completed his SAT exams with a perfect score of 800. Even later in life, as his body failed him, he was still doing geometry, calculus, trigonometry, etc. in his head. When he no longer had his sight, he could be seen doing his figures in the air with his fingers. His love of classical music is well-known, and almost became synonymous with his name. He often spoke and thought in metaphores that brought that love to life. Even as a teen-ager, he amassed a large collection of 33 1/3 rpm vinyl records of favorite composers and musicians, and later collected favorite CD's as well.

He and Judith met on a blind-date arranged by two friends of the couple, on June 23, 1962, a date that enjoyed a life of its own. They announced their engagement on June 23, 1964, and were married two years later on June 23, 1966, after Judith finished college. Jim worked at Clarke's Paint and Decorating Store, a family business, and became an expert with paints and color-matching. Along the way, Jim also developed an interest in woodworking, and set up a workshop in the basement of their first apartment. Sawdust gathered on everything, and finally the neighbors started complaining about the noise from the table saw and smell of the wood. They decided the time was right to move out and build a home of their own on property in Madison, right next to the home where Jim spent his summers as a child. There were happy times there, and a lot of parties, and of course, Jim had his own workshop, which took up half of the bottom level of the house. One of his proudest achievements was the completion of a 17 foot kayak (two-seater), which he covered with a lovely blue metallic coating. Jim paddled along the shore area of Madison and Guilford in Long Island Sound revisiting earlier roamings with his beloved Calypso.

In 1978, Jim and Judith decided to "go west", and ended up in Great Falls, Montana, where they
lived for 7 years. It was Jim’s dream to start a “natural food cafe”, so “The Gathering Place” was born on Dec. 21, 1978. Within two years, Jim started to lose his sight from detached retinas in both eyes, and while he did have partial vision for another 12 years, he finally became totally blind in the early 1990’s. The "GP" was sold, and they moved to Sandpoint, Idaho, in 1985. Here, Jim really came to life and made a huge imprint on all he met.

Still with partial vision, Jim would walk around Sandpoint with his white cane. He became a familiar sight to many as he wandered the town and stopped to visit. One of his favorite places was the East Bonner County Library, still at that time on Second Avenue. Many lifelong friends were made within those walls. With a passion for the library, Jim wanted to be able to do something to help support it. In 1989, he was one of a group of like-minded people who began the infant "Friends of the Library", and became charter members. FOL has gone on to become a vital part of the community, and helps to support the Library itself through its monthly Book Sales and other activities.

Jim continued to have a workshop, and loved exotic hardwoods. He became well-known for the small, exquisite baby rattles that he lovingly crafted. Many of those he sold or gave away have become treasured family heirlooms. He continued his woodworking and library projects throughout the years, and also created lovely gardens at home for all to enjoy. Even after totally losing his sight, Jim was much helped by the four months he spent in Boise with the Idaho Commission of the Blind, where he received excellent training. While there, his two favorite courses were learning Braille and cane travel, which helped him to retain his independence until Parkinson’s made that impossible.

Jim spent the final years of his life at Life Care in Sandpoint, where he received wonderful care, and again made many friends. He was an easy person to like, mild-mannered, gentle, and always interested in others. Given the multiple physical conditions that governed Jim’s life, his body has been donated to medical research to help others, something he always wanted to do. There will be a memorial celebration of Jim’s life at Oden Hall on Sunday, June 23rd at 1:00 pm, followed by a vegetarian potluck. His ashes will be spread in Long Island Sound off the coast of Connecticut, where he will once again be a part of the waters he so loved.

Memorial donations can be made to Talking Books, a branch of the Idaho State Library, to the East Bonner County Library, or to KPBX, Spokane Public Radio, all of which provided Jim with hours, days, and years of enjoyment and enrichment. Jim was a faithful attender of Sandpoint Friends Meeting, in Sandpoint, Idaho.