

Eli Vigderson - Celebration of Life - Obit - November 26, 2015

Eli Vigderson, 79, longtime Coronado resident, died in May while traveling in Israel.

Born November 5, 1935, in Tel Aviv, Israel, to Anya and Joseph, Eli was fascinated from a young age with anything that had a motor. He worked on fighter planes and bombers as a mechanic in the Israeli Air Force and started a motorcycle driving school in Tel Aviv in his early 20s, before setting off for new adventures in the United States. He lived in New York, Los Angeles, and Minnesota, before settling in San Diego in 1961 with his new wife, Janet. Eli and Janet had three children, son, Tal, followed by daughter Healy, and daughter Kate. Eli worked for various auto shops in San Diego before starting his own business, Eli's European Car Repair. His hard work over many years built what started as a single rented stall in a gas station into a successful Hillcrest landmark on University and 8th with its big yellow and black "Eli's" sign. He had many loyal, longtime customers over the years, and he was well-liked by just about everyone in the San Diego car business from dealers to auto body shops to parts suppliers ó even his competition. If a car was impossible to fix, Eli was the guy they called.

In 1995, after more than 30 years in business, Eli decided to move to the backseat and he brought in James Millar to do the heavy lifting, who continues to run the business successfully. With more time on his hands, Eli and his longtime partner, Eileen Johnson, embarked on a new chapter that included many international travel adventures. After first visiting many exotic and unusual locales, Eli and Eileen settled on two favorites, South Africa and Turkey, and for many years they spent the spring or fall in either place. Eli loved animals, and he especially loved searching out the big cats in South Africa's Kruger National Park that were hard to find. He and Eileen would set off early in the morning and they'd stay out all day until dark, trying to spot as much wildlife as they could. This resulted in many exciting stories, including being chased by a rhino and Eli having to reverse the car as fast as he could to get away, having the car nearly flipped by an elephant and being trapped in the car by baboons for hours. Over the years, they became good friends with the proprietors of the places where they stayed. When not traveling, Eli took long walks around Coronado Island, and he also frequented what he called "the office," Tidelands Park, where he impressed many passersby by doing up to 100 pull-ups at a time.

Eli enjoyed a closer relationship with his three children in recent years and he was proud of all their achievements. He was especially overjoyed to meet his two grandchildren shortly after their births ó first, Kate (and Eric's) daughter, Mira, in 2011, and then Tal (and Kelly's) son, Nicholas, in 2014. He was delighted to be a grandfather and you could see the happiness and pride in his face when he looked at his grandchildren.

Eli was predeceased by Eileen Johnson. He is survived by his three children, Tal (Kelly Allen), Healy, and Kate (Eric Sandquist), two grandchildren, and his loving companion, Kay Swan.

A celebration of life will be held on Saturday, December 5, 2015, from 2 to 4 pm, at Coronado Club Room, 1985 Strand Way, Coronado, CA 92118.