Alberto "Tito" Gambarini

Friends and family knew him as Tito, but he was born Alberto José Gambarini in Balcarce, Argentina, February 18, 1923. After an accomplished and adventurous life—as a surgeon and artist, a husband, father, and friend, a long-time cancer survivor, and a political activist—Tito took his last breath on the afternoon of April 27. He was surrounded by his children, Arturo, Jacqueline, and Patty, dear family friend Richard Friday, and caring staff at the Fisher Hospice Home in Amherst.



Born the eldest of two sons to the late Lucia Cerri and Alberto Gambarini, Tito had fond memories of childhood in Argentina. He attended early motion pictures at the Cine Moderno and especially loved Tarzan and Charlie Chaplin movies. He learned how to draw and paint, play soccer and basketball, and enjoyed visiting the beaches of nearby Mar del Plata during the summer months.

As a young man, Tito and his brother Arturo attended medical school at the Facultad de Medicina in Buenos Aires. Tito liked to note that his brother was in the same graduating class as Che Guevara. At medical school and in his training as a surgeon at Rawson Hospital, Tito was greatly influenced by his teachers Ricardo Finochietto and Bernardo Houssay. Finochietto mentored Tito and his brother and gave Tito one of the prototype chest retractors that he was developing with his own brothers Enrique and Angel. Houssay, winner of the 1947 Nobel Prize in physiology, was seen as anti-Peronist and was removed from his position at the University. Outraged by Houssay's ousting, Tito and other medical students protested. They were arrested and put in prison for one month. Tito recalled his friend Chalo being

series of art exhibits in the Rhode Island court houses with the help of Supreme Court Justice Gilbert Indeglia. Tito also held several solo shows and his works were accepted in several juried exhibits at museums. Tito often said he loved abstract painting because he could break the rules; something he could never do as a surgeon. As an artist, he did pull from his medical career, creating many abstract paintings of the "interior landscape" of the human body.

During these years in Rhode Island, Tito had a series of cancer diagnoses (stomach, prostate, and then bladder). He received treatment at Mass General Hospital and attributes his survival and periods of long remission to good medical care. He also credits the love of family and friends, his passion to create art, and his curiosity about disease.

In 2011, Elsa's death from ovarian cancer changed life dramatically for Tito and his family. Tito continued for a few more years

especially important in keeping spirits up during those days in the carcél as Chalo innovated cockroach races to help pass the time.

Tito came to the United States in 1958 for a one-year residency in Philadelphia with Dr. Thomas O'Neill, a renowned physician. Afterward, Tito planned to move to France where he had arranged for further medical specialization. All that changed, however, the moment he crossed paths with a bright, beautiful young Argentine woman named Elsa Krieger. A student at the University of Pennsylvania, she was close to the hospital when she walked by a construction site and felt something hard fly into her eye. When she stepped into the emergency room, Tito was the attending resident. Tito later referred to that moment in his life as pure "butterfly effect."

Tito and Elsa soon married in Philadelphia and had their first daughter Patricia Lucia. They then returned to settle in Argentina. But after only one year, the country's ongoing political and economic unrest prompted them to return to the States before the expiration of their green cards. They lived for a time in Providence, RI, where their daughter Jacqueline Anne and son Arturo Francisco were born.

Tito and his family then moved to Hartford and West Hartford, CT, where Tito worked as a cardiovascular and thoracic surgeon at St. Francis Hospital. Tito recalled great demands and lots of learning in those days of surgery. Following surgical procedures, he would often stay overnight in the hospital to monitor patients through to recovery. During this time, his children remember him joining family camping expeditions organized by Elsa. He also taught his children how to "scrub" properly for dinner. Even his nieces in Rhode Island. For his 90th birthday, he travelled back to Argentina with his children and granddaughter Lucia. He then moved to Easthampton to be near his daughter Patricia and her family. He rented a residential studio space at Eastworks with the idea of then finding an assisted living facility. But life at Eastworks was perfect for Tito. He quickly connected with many artists and neighbors in the building and found healing for new chronic neck pain with Josef Arnould, a chiropractor and owner of the Strength for Life Gym at Eastworks. Tito went to the gym once a day, sometimes twice. He even practiced balancing exercises while shaving.

Gatherings for European League soccer games around Tito's big-screen television were a common occurrence with dear friends Bryan Rourke, Will Bundy, Kim and Jackson Carlino, Sieggy Porth, Cristina Suarez, Kalina Dimova, and Rosario Torres. Tito's team was Barcelona; his favorite player of all time was Lionel Messi, a fellow Argentinian. When Barcelona played Real Madrid, Tito would joke with Cristina, a native of Madrid, and present her with a full box of tissues to comfort the anticipated grief.

Tito also developed close friends through the Cancer Connection, especially Jaime Alvarez who visited Tito regularly at the door of his studio throughout this pandemic year. Jon and Meredith Carroll were also dear to Tito, playing music from the Eastworks parking lot to help lift spirits this past year.

Tito often said, "As an old physician, I know my inevitable exit is coming." He was most concerned about the suffering at the end of life and having the ability to choose. He spoke often of death with dignity and the great work of John Berkowitz, who also became a dear friend. Tito felt so strongly about the issue that he and Jaime made a heroic trip by car last

and nephews fondly recall Tito's hand washing lessons.

Tito never lost his Argentinian accent when speaking English and often came up with amusing and original word combinations. When feeling in a lighter mood around this topic, he would sometimes inquire, "What's the matter, you don't understand my Boston accent?"

In the course of his career, Tito saw several medical colleagues die from heart attack and stroke. At his wife's urging, Tito decided to retire at age 65. Tito and Elsa moved to South Kingstown, RI, where he embraced his love of art. Even before retirement, Tito studied painting at Paier School of Art, and privately with distinguished artist Estelle Coniff.

In retirement, Tito attended classes at Rhode Island School of Design for two years, then visited Europe with Elsa to see the works of modern masters, especially the abstract expressionists. In their Rhode Island home, Tito and Elsa hosted a weekly painting group for 14 years, gathering in a large studio built by their son Arturo. Good food, wine, conversation, and laughter were central to these gatherings. The group presented shows together and pioneered a year to a Boston State House hearing to testify.

In addition to his children, Tito leaves his grandchildren Lucia Elsa Gambarini Rea, Alejandro Zane Gambarini, Clara Sophia Elsa Gambarini, his son in law Mark Stephen Rea, his son's partner Anna Brown Griswold, his sisters in law Delia Duarte Gambarini, Patricia Setteducati, brother in law Richard Setteducati, nieces María Fernanda Gambarini Duarte, Silvana Gambarini Duarte, and Linda Krieger, nephews Eric, Frank, Paul, and Rick Krieger, as well as many beloved friends.

The Gambarini family wishes to thank the many health professionals who cared for Tito through the years at MassGeneral and Cooley-Dickinson hospitals, and especially Dr. Peter Elsea in Northampton and Dr. Dariusz Kostrzewa in Narragansett, Rhode Island. The family is also grateful to the Fisher Hospice Home where nursing staff, health care aides, Dr. Richard Rosen, and administrators were exceptional in Tito's care during his last days.

Gifts in Tito's memory may be made to Massachusetts Death with Dignity (c/o John Berkowitz, 65 Franklin Street, Northampton MA 01060) or the Cancer Connection (41 Locust Street, Northampton, MA 01060).