



Robert Brown

September 3, 1923 - June 10, 2012

Robert Gwinn Brown, 88, passed away in Albuquerque, NM on June 10, 2012, after several years of complications from Alzheimer's disease. He was born in Kansas City, MO in 1923. Robert was the son of Robert Albert Brown and Gladys Gwinn Brown. His father, a World War I veteran, was a farmer in Sacramento, CA, but Bob spent much of his youth in San Francisco living with his maternal grandparents, where he began to study and was encouraged to pursue a higher education.

He served in the U.S. Navy during World War II as a naval aviator and a flight instructor in Pensacola, Florida. Bob trained pilots to land on aircraft carriers, a difficult and highly skilled activity. His naval career was interrupted by a life threatening accident. Bob was sitting on a wall with other naval aviators watching student practice landings. A student pilot came into the landing strip at an incorrect level, and the airplane wing flipped Bob up in the air 6 feet or so and he smashed to the ground. After the rescue of the student pilot from the crashed plane, a rescue worker noticed some movement of Bob on the pavement. He spent months in the hospital while many broken ribs and other bones healed. His main memories about that time revolved around the hospital staff allowing him to have ice cream any time he wanted. He enjoyed the Navy, and considered continuing in military service for a career. However, his fiancée, Betty, wanted to have children and felt that they would enjoy family life more without the demands of the military.

Bob met his wife, Betty, on a blind date in Los Angeles, CA, while he was

working at Douglas Aircraft and attending night school at UCLA. They attended the wedding of Bob's roommate and then dined and danced at the Coconut Grove. Bob and Betty were married at Betty's parent's home in Colonia, NJ on March 9, 1946. They had a brief honeymoon in Philadelphia. Because it was wartime, it was difficult to find hotel reservations.

Bob began his civilian career as an engineer for Barber Asphalt. The company was merged with Standard Oil of California, which remained his employer until his early retirement at age 56 in 1979. He retired from a full career as an oil company executive with Standard Oil of California (Chevron), during which he lived in New Jersey; Paris, France; Geneva, Switzerland; Tiburon, CA; and Hollywood, FL. He later became Vice President of Universal Petroleum Co. in Bermuda.

Bob used his creativity to avoid the traditional means of commuting to work in traffic. As a young married man in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when families only owned one car, he was often driven to the refinery plant in Rahway, NJ by his wife, and picked up by the family after work. When he worked in Geneva, Switzerland, he often walked to work, where his office had a view of the Jet d'Eau on Lake Geneva. While working in San Francisco, he took the ferry from Tiburon into the city, with Betty dutifully watching out the kitchen window for the return ferry, so she could drive down the hill to pick him up at the dock. When he worked in Bermuda, he drove his motor bike to the office wearing bermuda shorts, knee socks, a jacket and tie--the official attire of executives there.

Bob had two new houses built for his growing family: one in Colonia (the Little Red House) and one in Cranford, NJ. His children grew up in New Jersey until the family moved to Paris, France in 1961. There Bob set up the first international oil trading operations office for Chevron. He shared a posh executive office suite with Wallis Simpson, the Duchess of Windsor, including her cigar smoking female secretary. The family resided in Sevres, France until their move to Geneva, Switzerland in 1962. Bob traveled extensively throughout the world for Chevron, including every continent except Australia.

He often traveled throughout the work week and came home on the weekend. He also took his family on many holiday trips around Western Europe. He was the President of the American Men's Club in Geneva, and enjoyed playing golf for business and pleasure. He and his family attended the Anglican Holy Trinity Church in Geneva.

Bob and Betty provided college educations in the States to all three of their children, and brought them home to Switzerland for holidays. Many family Christmas vacations were spent in Alpine resorts, such as Gstaad and Zermatt. Bob had an active social life when he and Betty lived in Smith's Parish, Bermuda. He was the amateur golf champion of the Mid-Ocean Club. In 1980, he and Betty gave their daughter, Wendy, a beautiful wedding in Bermuda, with horse drawn carriages and a reception at the Mid-Ocean Club. Bob enjoyed most of his retirement years in Fountain Hills, Arizona. When he and Betty were choosing a place to live in Phoenix, not far from their daughter, Robyn, it was the fountain manufactured by the same Swiss company as the Jet d'Eau, and the surrounding beautiful Superstition Mountains, that helped them decide on Fountain Hills. He flew his own Cessna airplane and made a memorable flight to Monument Valley; a photo of him in his plane against the natural sandstone formations graced the cover of Private Pilot Magazine. He liked the mountains and served as a member of the Fountain Hills Mountain preservation group, clearing hiking trails. He played golf several times a week at the Desert Hills Golf Course and won several amateur tournaments there. He made the short trip to the Golf Club in his golf cart from his house on Fairway Court. He and Betty attended Fountain Hills Presbyterian Church where he served as an Elder.

He provided family reunions in Mission Beach, San Diego and Traverse City, MI, as well as many family holidays at his places of residence. He enjoyed being with the three generations of his family. He and his wife moved to Albuquerque in 2010 into Atria Vista Del Rio, an assisted living community. They were devoted to each other for 66 years of marriage.

He is survived by his wife, Betty; his three children, Robyn Hoffman of Tijeras, NM, Robert G. Brown, Jr. of Kalamazoo, MI., and Wendy Giardina of Rheinfelden, Switzerland; seven grandchildren and a niece and a nephew. He was a loving husband, father and caring friend. His family and friends will remember his subtle wit, his sense of fairness, his integrity, reliability, honesty, modesty and quiet strength.

A Memorial Service will be held on July 21, 2012, at 10:00 am at Mountainside United Methodist Church, 4 Penny Lane, Cedar Crest, NM.

Tribute Wall

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“ Bob was a steadying force and father figure for me in the years immediately following the death of my own father. I shall always remember our times together on the Colonia Country Club golf course and in his den on Oak Tree Pass in Westfield, sipping J&B and discussing current events. He really was the first "international" person i had known and he had a much greater impact on my life than he realized----NSC

Neil Cumsky - July 01, 2012 at 12:00 AM