



Robert Richard Becker

February 16, 1923 - August 25, 2013

Robert Richard Becker of Corvallis passed away peacefully on Aug. 25, 2013, in the presence of family. He was 90 years old.

The son of Rudolph, a Lutheran minister, and Hermine, “Bob” was born on Feb. 16, 1923, in Rabbit Lake Township, near Aitkin, Minnesota. He was the youngest of five children and is preceded in death by his brothers Arnold, Leonard, and Herman and his sister Ruth.

The Becker family soon moved to Wahpeton, North Dakota, where Bob attended school and displayed an early interest in chemistry, a field of study he would pursue his entire life. In 1942, Bob earned a scholarship to Harvard University, which he attended before joining the war effort. He served as a meteorologist for the Army Air Corps and was de-commissioned as a First Lieutenant in 1946.

Following World War II, Bob finished his undergraduate degree at the University of North Dakota. He received his Ph.D. in biochemistry, with an emphasis in protein chemistry, from the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Bob realized his childhood dream of becoming a college professor at Columbia University, where he taught for eight years. He also worked as a biochemist at Oak Ridge National Laboratory and Union Carbide. It was

during the Columbia years that he met Mary, who received a doctorate in biochemistry and nutrition and shared an enthusiasm for proteins. Married in 1956, they formed an inseparable bond, sharing a rich and productive professional and domestic life together.

The Becker family moved to Corvallis from Oak Ridge, Tennessee, in 1962 and have called this community home ever since. Bob enjoyed a long and distinguished career as a professor of Biochemistry and Biophysics at Oregon State University until his retirement in 1989. He led an active research program specializing in the modification and aggregation of proteins, with important ramifications for immunology and disease control. He was a highly regarded instructor and graduate advisor, and was recognized as such as the recipient of the College of Science's Carter Award for Outstanding Teaching, the Ritchie Distinguished Professor Award, the OSU Alumni Association Distinguished Professor Award, and the Curtis D. Mumford Faculty Service Award.

Never one to relax at home, Bob continued his thirst for knowledge into retirement, teaching courses at Ocean University in Qingdao, PRC, studying deep ocean vents aboard the deep-sea submersible Alvin, collecting data from helicopter surveys into the bowl of the still-active Mount St Helens volcano, and serving as the all-knowing science wizard for his grandchildren.

Bob believed in serving both his academic and civic communities, and his contributions will remain timeless. He served as one of the first presidents of the OSU Faculty Senate, was a leader in the American Association of University Professors, and was one of the founders and the first president of the Association of Oregon Faculties. He served on countless OSU committees, task forces, and advisory groups, notably as a member of the Board of Intercollegiate Athletics (he was a devoted Beavers fan). Bob was also an officer and leader in several retirement organizations, including the

board chairmanship of Oregon Public Retirees, Inc. He served as the Oregon Chapter President and Northwestern Regional Representative of the American Heart Association and worked from the 1970s onward on behalf of anti-tobacco legislation at both the state and local levels. He was a part of the driving force that curbed the public use of tobacco in Corvallis and was a proud recipient of the Maurine Neuberger Award for Distinguished Career Achievement.

Anyone who knew Bob knew that - after his family and his profession - the driving force in his life was fishing. He took his daughters fishing from a very young age, handcrafted fishing rods for his grandchildren, and spent three weeks each summer for 20 years fishing in the wilds of Alaska. He had a great love for the high desert and the cabin that he and his family, friends, and graduate students helped to construct. He and Mary led an active retirement, traveling to visit their daughters' families, competing in bowling leagues, and enjoying friends in their exercise class.

Bob is survived by his wife Mary; daughters Nancy Roberts (Greg) and Janet Becker (Mark Merrifield), and grandchildren Sophia and Anna Merrifield, and Jennifer, Katharine, and Jeffrey Roberts. A memorial service to celebrate Bob's life will be held on Saturday, September 14th at 11:00 AM at McHenry Funeral Home, followed by a reception. A private burial at the Willamette National Cemetery in Portland will occur later in the week. In lieu of flowers, please direct gifts in Bob's memory to the American Heart Association: www.heart.org

Tribute Wall

JR

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



John Ruben - October 07, 2025 at 09:10 PM

JR

Bob was among the best guys and best fisherman I've ever known. This was his biggest King Salmon.

John Ruben - October 07, 2025 at 09:12 PM

BP

“ *Dear Aunt Mary, words cannot express my sympathy for you and and your girls and their families. The world is a sadder place without Uncle Bob. The news of my dear Uncle Bob's death did not reach me until yesterday, when one of my nieces remarked what a wonderful life he'd led and described his obituary. He was a wonderful man indeed; we always looked forward to his visits when he was in the DC area. I will never forget our conversations after we lost my Mom, his sister Ruth, last year. He shared so many reminiscences of childhood with his 'Sis.'*

Bobbi Ruth Proctor - November 03, 2013 at 02:40 PM

MH

“ *Mary and family, When I was a young researcher working in Ag. Chemistry, we collaborated with Bob's lab on a small project. He became a friend and mentor; his door was always open. His wise counsel was so much appreciated. He will be missed.*
Marilyn Henderson

Marilyn Henderson - October 01, 2013 at 10:51 PM

BQ

“ *Remembering many happy shared departmental occasions with Bob and Mary during our stay in Corvallis.... Please accept my sympathy for your loss.* *Barbi Quatrano*

Barbara Quatrano - September 15, 2013 at 02:52 PM

PM

“ *Mary, Nancy, Janet and Family,*
I was so sorry to hear of Bob's passing. Bob and your family were such a central core to my childhood memories of growing up in Corvallis. Bob was a delightful man, full of energy and generous with his smile. I know my dad was very fond of him. His memory will be cherished. My thoughts, and those of the MacDonald family, are with you in this difficult time. *Peggy*

Peggy MacDonald - September 14, 2013 at 08:02 AM

CF

“ In addition to his many, many other accomplishments, his wisdom and friendship, Bob is a Public Health hero. His work to help pass some of the first tobacco control ordinances in the US has saved countless lives in Corvallis and Benton County. He was given a special Benton County Public Health Lifetime Achievement award during 2012 Public Health Week.

I will miss him and my thoughts are with you.

Charlie Fautin

Charlie Fautin - September 12, 2013 at 09:11 PM

BB

“ *Bill and I have many wonderful memories of Bob. He was always a gentleman, always interesting to talk to, and always kind and concerned for others. We will miss seeing him around the ALS building on campus. Our condolences to all the family.*

Bill and Beth Baird

Beth Baird - September 12, 2013 at 07:08 PM



“ *Sentiments of Serenity Spray was purchased for the family of Robert Richard Becker.*



September 12, 2013 at 04:48 PM

SC

“ Uncle Bob was one of my favorite people. His curiosity about the world around him never faltered. He lived his life as a student and a marvelous teacher. His kindness and attention within the Becker family was a blessing to us all.

He was amazed and deeply grateful on his 90 th birthday saying " it has been quite a ride" !

Uncle Bob, you will be deeply missed, but many people, friends, family, associates and students will celebrate with gratitude to have shared the ride with you.

Sue Becker Curtiss

susan becker curtiss - September 12, 2013 at 02:41 PM

HC

“ We have been friends of the Becker family for over 50 years and we will miss Bob so much. He had a serious side and a funny side and he was so proud of his children and his grandchildren. What a wonderful scientific legacy! Ken and Henny Chambers

Henny Chambers - September 11, 2013 at 11:43 AM

PM

“ Mrs. Becker, Nancy, and Janet,
You all, along with Dr. Becker, have been a large part of many childhood memories. I wish to extend my heartfelt condolences for this great loss. I am saddened, but feel extremely fortunate to have spent time with this man who, besides my own father, is the adult male I remember being around the most as I tagged along to go fishing with them, or our families would have get-togethers.

Thoughts and prayers be with you all. Thank you for sharing this man with so many people.

Peter Morita

Peter Morita - September 11, 2013 at 12:56 AM

DM

“ *Long time friend, fine citizen, and an old-style professor*

Dean Malencik - September 10, 2013 at 03:14 PM



“ *Dear Becker family,
What wonderful memories I have of living close by the Becker family. Harding School, Western View and CHS....great times. Please know that you are all in our prayers. Cherish the memories of your wonderful husband/dad/grandfather. Dick and Karen (Hansen)Oldfield and family*

Karen Oldfield - September 10, 2013 at 12:47 PM

LW

“ *Bob and Mary have been wonderful neighbors for many years. Bob and Lee could talk fishing or academia anytime. I appreciated Bob on Athletic Advisory Committee - he was always prepared and unafraid to stand his ground on subjects. He put in so much time on PERS to better lives of others. Bob was a wonderful example of a perfect gentleman and we will miss him.*

Lee Schroeder and Lynda Wolfenbarger

Lynda Wolfenbarger - September 10, 2013 at 10:31 AM

CL

“ *Dear Mary and family: Bob embodied all the best qualities of a gentleman, family man, scientist, public citizen, and role model for the rest of us. Our thoughts are with you. Craig and Nancy Leman*

Craig and Nancy Leman - September 09, 2013 at 06:55 PM

LD

Robert Becker always found time to discuss science and offer sound advice and encouragement.

This was much appreciated

Thank you Bob

Laurence (Larry) Daley

Laurence Daley - September 12, 2013 at 09:26 AM

BW

“*Bob was a valued friend and colleague, an academic leader who made Oregon State University a better and more humane place. He served outstandingly long after others would have given up. Condolences to the Becker family from Bill and Caroline Wilkins*

Bill Wilkins - September 07, 2013 at 06:22 PM

JB

“*Bob was part of the glue that held our rehab class together. I remember him fondly. Always with a smile and a good story to tell. He will be missed.*

Jan Boger

Janice Boger - September 07, 2013 at 05:32 PM

RL

“*Bob and I served together on the AAUP board for decades, Bob even after retirement. Bob was always the gentlemen, always concerned, always outspoken, often outraged, but always with kind things to say about others. The combo of Bob and Will Gamble served as a model for those who followed. Bob will be missed, and for good reason.*

Rubin Landau

Rubin Landau - September 07, 2013 at 11:24 AM

CD

I'll remember Bob's passion for life. He was always engaged with a bright smile and a good story. I enjoyed trading stories with him about Alaska trips.

Carroll DeKock

Carroll DeKock - September 14, 2013 at 11:41 AM

JR

Great fishing partner in Alaska for 15 summers!! Could out fish anyone!

john ruben - February 18, 2025 at 04:50 PM