*Robert Gerald Kroll*



April 14, 1924 ~ September 19, 2023

After fighting serious health issues for several years, Robert Gerald Kroll, DDS of Southern Pines, NC died peacefully on September 19, 2023, at the age of 99 after a brief stay at FirstHealth Hospice House in West End, NC. Bob leaves behind his beloved wife Helen (Friedman Cohen), children Peter (Patricia Novak) and Tana (Mike Young); stepchildren Marcia (David) Cohen, Barry (Patty) Cohen, Lee (Diane) Cohen, and Mark Cohen; grandchildren Erica Korngut, Jeremy Cohen, Brynn Stott Cohen, Tamara Cohen, Samantha Cohen, Nicole Cohen, Rebecca Cohen, and Megan Rand; and eight great-grandchildren. He was predeceased by his parents, Tom and Sadye Kroll, and brother Craig Kroll.

Born on April 14, 1924, Bob packed considerably more than a century’s worth of living into the almost 100 years he completed. And he loved life. In 1980, he married the love of his life, Helen, and he loved his kids and grandchildren, parents, brother, and cousins. And they loved him.

Not boisterous, not big in build or stature, but a charming and friendly man with a big grin, Bob maintained lifelong friendships, from his childhood buddies in their self-styled “Park Avenue Gang” in Passaic to fellow athletes, professional colleagues, the guys at the airport, and many, many more whose lives he touched.

At the University of Illinois, he weathered both college and US Navy training. After the initial Naval service, he returned to complete his dental education at the University of Minnesota Dental School, where he earned his dental degree and then completed his service in the Navy. In 1952, as the athletic officer on the USS Dixie, his ship arrived in port at Sasebo, Japan, too late to contribute sailors to the United States team competing against the other national teams at the base. Bob persuaded the International Track Meet officials to allow his shipmates to compete as an independent team. They won the tournament, with the United States finishing second.

Along with stints working in New York metropolitan area hospitals, Bob opened a private practice in Clifton, NJ. He then started his family in Oakland, NJ in the mid-1950s with his first wife, Arlene (Singer), raising Peter and Tana.

He was a man of action. Soon after moving to Millburn, NJ in 1963, he charged into a house in flames up the street to rescue a neighbor.

Advancing the dental profession was important to him, and he served on the faculty of dental schools at Seton Hall University, the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, and Rutgers University. At the same time, with his colleague Justin Stone, he developed a unique private dental practice serving patients that other dentists were unwilling or unable to serve: the physically or mentally challenged, and the very young and very fearful. In a seminal article published in 1967, they documented the relationship between tooth decay in babies and being put to bed with nursing bottles of milk or sweet drinks. After decades of operating one of the few practices in their specialized area, Bob and Justin were asked to establish a special care clinic to teach future dentists at Rutgers University, a program that continues today.

He had many passions beyond dentistry. He loved to fly. Starting in 1950, he earned his multiengine, commercial, and glider ratings, flew aerobatic maneuvers (carrying along note cards as memory joggers—ask his son about that flight) and he continued piloting a series of small planes into his 90s. He built a working hovercraft and essentially completed a homebuilt BD-5 aircraft in his garage.

Developing an early appreciation of folk music, he recorded radio broadcasts—on a wire recorder at first. Songs of social justice inspired him. During his last days, Pete Seeger programs playing on YouTube sparked happy memories. Playing tennis was a favorite pastime for decades, shared with Helen and Tana.

Bob wrote. He wrote papers—including one written in verse—published in dental journals and articles in aviation magazines. He edited professional and aviation newsletters. He was a poet, publishing a book of selections of his work.

And he wrote letters to the editor. On all subjects. When he saw illogic or injustice, he would do his best to shine a light on it and do what he could to correct it.

A battler, his body bore the injuries of his amateur wrestling career, though he rarely complained. High-level competition on the University of Minnesota varsity team and the West Side (NYC) YMCA team brought him an invitation to represent the US in the Maccabiah Games. An AAU tournament match with Donald Rumsfeld, future US Secretary of Defense, was recounted years later in a widely distributed article. While focusing on how the match gave insight into Rumsfeld, the recounting said much about Bob as well (he lost the match but earned respect as a tenacious and gracious competitor). Son Peter recalls that around the age of 10, his dad convinced him that he was among Bob’s toughest opponents at the West Side Y, often wrestling to a draw (at least according to his dad’s scoring). Even after his active wrestling days were over in his forties, he continued to do volunteer coaching into his 70s (occasionally getting down on the mat) at the local high schools.

Before and after his retirement (in 1998, after which he moved to Whispering Pines and then Southern Pines, NC), he served numerous communities: as an officer in medical and dental societies, as a Cub Scout Cubmaster, as a member of the Whispering Pines Planning Board, as an officer of Experimental Aviation Association chapters in New Jersey and North Carolina. He introduced over 100 youngsters to flying in the EAA’s Young Eagles program. In his 80s, he brought meals to the elderly for Meals on Wheels and refurbished donated items at Habitat for Humanity.

Dentist, pilot, athlete, writer, poet, and educator. And to those closest to him, he was a caring and devoted friend, husband, and father, whom they loved dearly. He will be missed.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to “Rutgers University Foundation in support of the Dr. Justin Stone and Dr. Robert Kroll Endowed Scholarship” at the Rutgers School of Dental Medicine Special Care Center, or to any charitable organization. Donations to the scholarship can be sent to PO Box 193, New Brunswick, NJ 08903, or can also be made online at <https://give.rutgers.edu/StoneKrollEndowedScholarship>

Condolences can be made at PinesFunerals.com