



Carl Robert "Bob" Mesterton

September 15, 1927 - January 23, 2017

Robert C. Mesterton, cinematographer and documentarian, teacher, talented figure skater and skier, world traveler, and third generation stamp collector, died January 23 after a valiant battle with cancer. He was 89, and even at the end, was making everyone around him laugh with his wry observations of human nature.

Bob was born just outside of New York City to Sonja Mesterton, of the Åland Islands in Finland, and Kuno Mesterton, from Helsinki, Finland. Bob's parents met while his father, a talented wood carver, expert carpenter and artist, was managing the estate of Sonja's neighbor. After they met and married, they moved to New York in 1922. Kuno became an estate manager on a large Long Island property, and Sonja had Bob, their only child, in 1927. Bob grew up speaking Swedish and English at home. Sonja and Kuno divorced around 1930, but it gave Sonja a chance to use her medical training—a field few women of her era entered.

Sonja studied sports medicine and teaching at a famous Finnish medical school, and then practiced what is now called "physical therapy" for many years, working with some of the most famous families of New England to help them recover from accidents and chronic diseases. Kuno fitted grand luxury yachts with highly crafted mahogany interiors while living in New York City (most notably the yacht of Howard Hughes), and then retired to West Palm Beach where he made elegant Scandinavian-style furniture, lighting, pottery and artwork, and won many art shows. Sonja retired to a small town in

southern New Jersey, bought a pre-Revolutionary War house, and spent her retirement rehabilitating it and showing it to visitors. She also became an award-winning sculptor and painter, and later a doting grandmother.

While in middle school during WWII, Bob spent several summers working on a dairy farm in Killington, Vermont where he helped fill in for the farmer's sons, who were serving in the war. While there, Bob took up what was to become his first profession—photography—using the farmer's shed as his darkroom after the cows were put to bed. His bucolic photos captured Vermont's rustic beauty and serenity. Bob, who grew up with his mother in Rye, New York, became an accomplished skier and figure skater, following his mother's lead—Sonja had won a medal for ice dancing in the Junior Olympics. Bob later taught figure skating for many years at the University of Vermont.

While serving two years stateside during the Korean War, Bob met his future wife from Brooklyn, Laura Wahlsteen, a rising radio actress and performer with the Top Hatters, at the famous Stage Door Canteen. When asked why he first asked her to dance, he said, "Because I looked across the room and she was the most beautiful lady in it." Our mother was equally smitten with the tall, blonde athletic serviceman and they were married six months after they met, and lived near Fort Hamilton in Brooklyn.

Bob was determined to make cinematography his career. First he graduated with a degree in business in Vermont, then learned his profession at the legendary Columbia Broadcasting School of Television in New York City. Later, he followed his CBS ties back to Vermont to become its first chief news cinematographer at WCAX-TV in Burlington.

He covered everything from politicians (photographing governors, senators, celebrities and every president from Truman through Reagan) to major events. Later, he was the first cinematographer to be allowed to photograph a courtroom trial in Florida.

Bob also made travel documentaries, taking his very grateful family, which now included daughters Carla and Karen. They saw exciting places like the "new" Disneyland in California, the 1964 World's Fair where Walt Disney

debuted “It’s a Small World,” and met many celebrities including Roy Rogers and Trigger, and one of the girls’ favorites, Lassie and trainer Rudd Weatherwax. And long before they invented “Take Your Daughter to Work Day,” Bob took his daughters on many film and documentary assignments, fueling Karen’s interest in working in journalism and Carla’s interest in investigative photography.

But many Vermont winters took their toll, so Laura, Bob and daughters decided to head south. With letters of recommendation from both Vermont’s governor and a US senator, Bob applied to an up-and-coming TV station that had just joined the newly formed Public Broadcasting System in 1969—WFSU-TV. The station converted to color broadcasting in 1972, giving Bob an even more exciting venue to show off his documentary work. When the station added a satellite link in the early 1980s, daughter Karen covered the event for the Florida Flambeau, where she was a staff writer. Many times during her newspaper work in Tallahassee, Karen and Bob found themselves working side by side, but for different news operations. At times, Karen, Carla and Bob all found themselves working on the same story, as they did during the Chi Omega murders at FSU, with Karen and Bob doing news, and Carla working in the State Attorney’s office.

With the birth of two granddaughters, Sarah Elizabeth, 1992, and Alexandra Maria, 1994, Bob and Laura became devoted grandparents, getting to teach both Sarah and Alex how to swim, do crafts, take photographs and make their own videos. Bob gave Sarah her first camera at the age of 3, and Karen thanked him, but suggested he pay for the developing costs of what she was sure would be crooked, blank photos. So he was exceptionally pleased to show her Sarah’s first set of photos—all straight and well framed. He was also assistant director and editor of several comedy films that Sarah and Alex made with their friends, and frequently acted in them as well. Bob was their chief cheerleader in everything they did, and in return he has always had their complete adoration and love. He never underestimated what any child at any

age could accomplish. When Laura died after 46 years of marriage, the girls were still young, so he took over her grandmother duties, too, playing dolls with them and taking them shopping.

After retiring from WFSU-TV, Bob took up a second career as a teacher of cinematography at the new FSU Film School, and continued at TCC for 12 years. He loved teaching his students the art of video and motion pictures just as he had loved teaching his children and grandchildren. He has also been a long-standing member of the Tallahassee Stamp Club, and loved being with friends who shared his joy in stamp collecting.

The family wishes to thank those who took such excellent care of our father: Jennifer Mason, who saved his leg and extended his life one year through lymph therapy; Ticara Littles and Alma Ramon, chief among the wonderful staff from Big Bend Hospice; Dr. John MacKay and his amazingly kind staff; Dr. Joseph Camps, Jr. and Dr. Armand Cognetta, who were so caring; Gail McDonald and the wonderful staff at Allegro Assisted Living Facility; Bryan and Clifford from Hopewell Senior Care; Attorney Robert Pierce and Paralegal Sherri Pelham; family friend Dan Crapser; and all of our extended family and friends who were so kind to our Dad and are so supportive of us in this sad time. Todd Wahlquist with Bevis Funeral Home is assisting the family with their arrangements. 850-385-2193, www.bevisfh.com