



Robert John Cence, PhD

July 16, 1930 – April 17, 2023

Robert (Bob) John Cence, aged 92 of Honolulu – beloved husband, father, stepfather, grandpa, brother and uncle – passed away peacefully at home on April 17, 2023 after a brief illness.

Bob was born on July 16, 1930 in Cleveland, OH. Born the oldest of four children, Bob moved with his family to California during the great depression. Bob was relieved to attend the University of California at Berkeley after surviving a parochial high school and working summers picking pears. Bob received his undergraduate degree in physics in 1952 (the first in his family to do so) and received his PhD in 1960. After a postdoc at Berkeley, he was recruited in 1961 to help build the newly formed Physics PhD program at the University of Hawaii, Manoa. He was one of the first hires to this program after statehood and, thus, began his new life in Hawaii with his first wife and two children (Alan and Lynda).

Bob spent his career doing research, teaching, and mentoring physics students. He published “Pion-Nucleon Scattering” in 1969, which continues to be an important reference for a specific study of elementary particle physics. In 1972, Bob spent a sabbatical year in Geneva, Switzerland at the CERN nuclear laboratory with a research team looking for the “W meson”. While this team was unsuccessful during that year, Bob did find and marry his second wife, Helena (Lena), in 1973. Her four children (Ann, Mats, Lars, Helena) grew the family exponentially.

Not one usually concerned with formality, Bob often showed up to teach in the corduroy shorts he wore biking to the University. In 1991, Bob received his greatest academic honor, the “Presidential Citation for Meritorious Teaching”. In his spare time, Bob loved to garden, hike the valleys of Kauai, camp at Bellows or Nanakuli beaches, travel the world with his family, play the piano, and tutor inmates at Halawa Correctional Facility. For the latter, Bob received the “First Lady’s Outstanding Volunteer Award” from Mrs. George R. Ariyoshi in 1983. Bob retired in 1995 with the title “Professor Emeritus” and continued to have lunch on Wednesdays with the other retired and working physics professors.

As a side gig, Bob got his real estate license in 1982 to support his wife, Helena, in her real estate career. After retirement from UH, this side gig became a full-time pursuit of sitting open houses and analyzing trends for their monthly newsletters when he wasn’t on the squash courts at the Honolulu Club. Many a person left the court head down after learning they had been beaten by a 70 or 80-year-old.

Bob was loved by so many for his quirky mannerisms, deadpan humor, and pithy sayings. The latest being “most 92-year-olds I know are already dead”. So true Bob, so true....

Bob is survived by his wife of almost 50 years, Helena, his son Alan and daughter Lynda, his additional children Ann Mulhauser, Mats Wallin, Lars Wallin, and Helena Wallin-Miller, and by his numerous grandchildren, great grandchildren, nieces, and nephews.

To honor Bob’s legacy, the family suggests donations to the Robert J. Cence Equity and Access Fund at the University of Hawaii Foundation to support first generation college students. Please direct check donations to Fund #130-2770-4 or give directly online at <https://giving.uhfoundation.org/funds/13027704>. The family held a private service.

