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Robert N. Cohen (/obituaries/7642-robert-n-cohen)

RECENT OBITUARIES (/OBITUARIES) · 16 DECEMBER 2021



Southern Gentleman. Still waters run deep. Intellectual. Perfect husband. Moustache forever. Loving father. Japanese Film. Photographer. Grace. Dignity. Devastatingly gone.

Plopped down in Longview, Texas by his optometrist dad and homemaker mom, Bob played the game of Texas as a junior high football player, Boozier City party boy and high school class vice president and Key Club president.

Wearing cowboy boots and known as “Bobby,” he enjoyed a kid’s life in East Texas, along with his sister, Patty, four years his junior, and his stepsisters, Nan, Lynn and Cindy, who moved in with their mom after marriage to Bob’s dad after Bob’s mother passed away. While the women ruled the roost, this good ole boy worked summers at the local brewery for a six pack and a few bucks and longed to get out of small town America for something more exciting and challenging.

Off he went to Northwestern University where he watched movies with friends all night in local theatres, became a frat boy with Phi Ep, and graduated with a degree in film. With the Vietnam War looming and a low draft number, he went to the Peace Corps in Korea teaching a poor country recovering from war how to entice travelers to make South Korea their trip of choice. The freedom he experienced offered opportunities to travel Asia where he was determined to settle after he got a visa post-Peace Corps and a CO status from the Army, all with the hope to make a life in Japan.

But the diversion came in the form of Nancy Elaine Sher, who he met while visiting his sister Patty at the University of Texas. Bob patiently waited for her to graduate and kept busy getting his Master’s Degree in Film from the University of Texas before sweeping the two of them off to Japan for two years in Tokyo, where Bob was the resident scholar at the Tokyo Museum of Art Film Center. A career as a Japanese film scholar was born followed by a Ph.D. in film from the University of California at Los Angeles and years of teaching at UCLA and UC Santa Barbara.

Bob longed for something more in film than writing criticism and articles for intellectual magazines such as Film Comment and Sight and Sound. So he tackled the development world, working for Larry Schiller as he developed the Executioner’s Song for a TV miniseries, and the world of screenwriting which brought him the Nichol Fellowship from the Motion Picture Academy of Arts and Sciences for his screenplay, “The Good Ole Boy,” a story of a young Jewish boy growing up in East Texas and his relationship with a black musician.

The screenwriting gig allowed enough time for him to be with Aaron, the product of 11 years of marriage at the time, as he worked from home, drove car pool, and was a part time stay-at-home Dad.

Bob’s love was as a photographer. While he would shoot in color, his clearest visions were in black and white, much like the movies he loved, and he shot places, not people, including, most notably his work in Kansas City published as the “Garden and the City” and his long time project of Jewish cemeteries in Texas, a project now housed at the Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin.

Bob was involved in community endeavors including as a member of the Board of Trustees of Valley Beth Shalom Day School during Aaron’s school years. He was also a member of the Henry and Emma Rogan Society at Northwestern University and remained active with the Nicol Fellowship of the Motion Picture Academy.

Bob battled leiomyosarcoma with the dignity he exemplified all his life, each day a gift to the family until his final moments. Bob always said to “pull the plug if I can’t watch old movies and eat ice cream.” That moment came and so he went.

He leaves his wife, Nancy, after almost 49 years of marriage, and Aaron, 37 years old. He also leaves his wonderful stepsisters and their spouses Nan Gold and Bo Von Der Ahe, Dr. William Meyers and Lynn Meyers, and Dr. Armond Schwartz and Cindy Schwartz, along with 8 loved nieces, nephews and 7 great-nieces and nephews.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in Bob's memory to Valley Beth Shalom, 15739 Ventura Blvd, Encino, CA 91436.



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