

Robert Chipman Fletcher

May 27, 1921 ~ June 14, 2022

Robert Chipman Fletcher, who died of natural causes on June 14 at 101, was a man of near-perfect integrity, who never failed to keep his promises or meet his obligations. A man whose personal discipline was as legendary as his tennis serve. A man who knew how to flash a winning smile, how to install an electrical outlet, how to win at pingpong or bridge, how to play horsey with kids and grandkids, and how to have deep religious or political conversations with anyone who asked.

Bob read physics textbooks for pleasure, delighted in scientific discovery, read several daily newspapers, took classes on myriad topics until the pandemic closed down the University of Utah, and believed he had a theory that might one day be worthy of a Nobel Prize (sadly, he noted, it is not given posthumously).

Though he had questions about Mormonism, he was committed to its principles and practices. Believing that “whatsoever thing is good is just and true,” as it says in LDS scriptures, he gave his all to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, whether serving as high counselor, bishop or patriarch. The faith stretched Bob in unexpected ways, including mentoring future missionaries, reaching out to those who had doubts, and even dressing up as Robert Redford for a ward production. It taught him the benefits of communal prayers as he battled kidney cancer and to embrace each of his children’s spouses, including the partner of his gay son.

The fifth of seven children (one sister and five brothers, one of whom died in childhood) of Harvey and Karen Lorena Chipman Fletcher, Bob was born May 27, 1921, in an apartment on the upper west side of New York.

Within a few years, the family moved to Flushing, Queens, where he spent his childhood playing football in the streets with Jewish, Catholic and Protestant friends as well as his brothers.

His dad, a respected American physicist known as the “father of stereophonic sound,” schooled the boys in the art, thinking and practice of science and all but one made that their career.

While studying physics at MIT, Bob met a vivacious Boston University music student in their Cambridge LDS ward. Though Rosemary Bennett had a boyfriend back in Utah, the shy future physicist was smitten, so he took her to dinners, dances and date nights until he won her over.

The couple were married in the Salt Lake Temple on Sept 6, 1945, and eventually welcomed eight children — five girls and three boys.

The controlled chaos of their home — filled with laughter, classical music, show tunes and theater, where guests were always welcome and storytelling was a high art — was not exactly what Bob had envisioned, but oh how he loved those children, individually and collectively, and their mom.

After earning a doctorate from the prestigious university, he spent his entire career at Bell Telephone Laboratories in New Jersey (with a stint at one of its subsidiaries, Sandia Corp., in Albuquerque, NM.), eventually retiring as a

top administrator at 65 in 1986, and then immediately getting a job as director of research at Ceramics Processing Systems Corp. in Boston, where he worked for a few years.

In 2000, Bob and Rosemary moved to Utah, where he began in earnest taking classes at the U, and worked intensely on his theory that the speed of light is variable, not constant, and published it on an international cosmology website.

After Rosemary died in 2009, he remained independent, returned to his research, learned to use the microwave, enjoyed the company of his kids and grandkids, traveled to important family events (including a visit with them back to his beginnings in Boston and New York), and continued to play tennis until he was 93.

“I am the oldest player on the court,” he quipped, “but I’m not the worst.”

Bob is survived by children Kathryn (Robert) Fowles, Robert Bennett (Gail) Fletcher, Peggy (Mike) Stack, Tina (Doug) John, David Wallace Fletcher (George Reddick), Frances Carol (Clark) Young, Elizabeth (Victor) Patrick, and Russell Grant (Debora) Fletcher; 41 grandchildren, and 52 great-grandchildren. Two granddaughters, Camille Elizabeth Stack and Claire Linda Gail Sheffield, preceded him in death.

The funeral will be June 20, at noon at the Crestview LDS Ward Chapel (2795 Crestview Drive, Salt Lake City. Viewings are on Sunday, June 19, 6 to 8 p.m., at Larkin Sunset Lawn Mortuary, and Monday, June 20, 10:30 to 11:30 a.m., at the chapel.

To watch via Zoom, click on the "Watch Services" button. A free Zoom Account is required to join services.