



## Dr. Robert Winston Ward

April 30, 1938 - December 17, 2023

Dr. Robert Winston Ward passed away peacefully on December 17 at the age of 85. In his final days he was surrounded by his family, who loved him immensely. He is survived by his wife of 54 years, Juanna Gail Waldo Ward; his four daughters, Christina Ward Niven (Mike), Rachel Ward, Jeanne Ward Meagher (Jim), and Katherine Ward Forbes (Robby); and his eight grandchildren, Zachary, Avery, Charlotte, Patrick, Harper, Will, Cal, and Sawyer.

Robert was a lover of family, vegetable gardens, travel, trees, literature, baseball statistics, fall foliage, genealogy, Willie Nelson, Shakespeare, hot sauce, war documentaries, good meals, old battlefields, stopping to read any historical-landmark sign on the side of any road anywhere—and above nearly anything else: his cherished family farm in Southwestern Virginia, which he inherited from his parents and never sold, raising cattle and managing it from afar (visiting as often as possible) until the end. His family will spread his ashes at the farm.

He was unfathomably frugal—and endlessly entertained by his own frugality. He could be curmudgeonly, he could be unnecessarily pessimistic, he could be irrationally suspicious. And yet: He was unwaveringly loyal to his loved ones. He was quick to smile. He laughed easily and often. He was at any moment capable of frustrating, to no end, the five central women in life—his

wife and daughters. Regardless, they adored him and felt eternally proud of who he was, and of all that he had achieved in his remarkable life.

Robert was born on April 30, 1938, to James and Marie Ward, on a farm in the tiny rural Appalachian town of Sugar Grove, Virginia. His mother was a schoolteacher and his father farmed their land, which had been in the family for several generations. Robert—an only child—was president of the Sugar Grove High School Class of 1956, but he did not particularly think college was in his future and made no plans in that direction.

His mother had other ideas, however, and after his high school graduation, she walked him into the president's office at Emory and Henry College and asked that they admit him immediately. They did, and after one year he transferred to Virginia Tech, intending to study engineering. He registered for classes late, however, and the engineering classes were full; a faculty member mentioned that he might check out a physics class. That offhand suggestion turned out to shape the course of his career.

Robert earned a B.S. in Physics in 1959. He went to work at NASA, Langley Field, and took graduate-level classes at night. He later returned to Virginia Tech to complete his graduate work—taking a temporary leave from NASA—and was awarded a PhD in Physics in 1968.

During his exciting years at NASA (1959–1969), he played a key role in the race to get humans to the moon by the end of the decade. He started in the Instrument Research Division, studying the measurement of the extremely high temperatures that would be encountered during the re-entry of a spacecraft. In 1962, he transferred from Langley to Johnson Space Center in Houston. In 1968 he became head of NASA's Laser Section, focusing on laser development and applications.

Robert met Juanna at a “singles mixer” in Houston, in 1966. Robert was the only man at the party to look at her nametag and pronounce her name correctly—this got her attention. They married on May 16, 1969.

Also in 1969, Robert accepted a position with Texas Instruments in Dallas, where he spent four years working on laser systems development.

In 1973 he joined the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA)—the Arlington, Virginia-based think tank for the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Marine Corps—and he and Juanna settled in Lake Ridge. He remained with CNA as a senior research scientist for almost 50 years, never quite willing to officially retire (even after his family held a retirement party for him at age 80). He was still doing occasional consulting work for CNA, from home, in his final years of life.

Highlights during his years with CNA included time in the organization’s Field Program, which provides on-scene analytical support to operational commanders worldwide. In 1977 he became a member of the staff of Commander, Tactical Wings Atlantic, at the Naval Air Station Oceana. Robert and Juanna moved to a new home nearby in Virginia Beach, with three little girls in tow. Their fourth daughter was born a few years later. Robert’s work at Oceana led to an assignment with Commander, Naval Air Forces. He went to sea frequently on aircraft carriers in an advisory role, including USS Nimitz, USS Eisenhower, USS Kennedy, USS Forrestal, and USS Saratoga.

In 1982, Robert’s first round of field assignments ended and he returned to headquarters. The family of six moved back to Lake Ridge. Nine years later, he flew to the USS John F Kennedy in the Red Sea, where he provided analytical support to the Navy for the duration of Operation Desert Storm.

Other notable projects in the decades that followed included an assignment

with Navy Central Command in Bahrain; direct analytical assistance to the Navy admiral in charge of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003; and work with the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS). In the fall of 2010, Robert accepted his final field assignment, with Commander, US Pacific Fleet, in Pearl Harbor, returning to CNA headquarters permanently thereafter.

Robert loved his career; he would have worked another 50 years if he could have. He was an exceptional man. He will be missed by so many.

A service to honor Robert's life will be held at 11:00am on Friday, February 23, 2024, at The River View at Occoquan (9751 Ox Road, Lorton, Virginia 22079). A reception will follow at the same venue.

Guests planning to attend the service can RSVP at the following link:

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeHFW5N6VrHVFneomkkz20\\_WDBPnb9a9C8RGIGsBDVVp1JpZA/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeHFW5N6VrHVFneomkkz20_WDBPnb9a9C8RGIGsBDVVp1JpZA/viewform)

# Previous Events

## Service

FEB **23**. 11:00 AM (ET)

The River View at Occoquan  
9751 Ox Road  
Lorton, VA 22079

# Tribute Wall



“ Bob was a friend since our days at Emory and Henry and then at VPI. He had an impressive career with NASA. He loved his family and wanted nothing but the best for them.

George Culbertson - June 26, 2024 at 11:05 AM



“ Love, Michael and Jennifer Toole planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Dr. Robert Winston Ward.

Love, Michael and Jennifer Toole - February 22, 2024 at 12:46 PM



“ Fiery Lily and Rose was purchased for the family of Dr. Robert Winston Ward.



February 22, 2024 at 12:46 PM



“ Love's Journey was purchased for the family of Dr. Robert Winston Ward.



February 21, 2024 at 02:54 PM

GF

“ *Glenda Vincent & Mary Linda Gay Family purchased the Divine Peace Bouquet for the family of Dr. Robert Winston Ward.*



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**Glenda Vincent & Mary Linda Gay Family** - February 20, 2024  
at 11:14 AM



“ *Dreams From the Heart Bouquet was purchased for the family of Dr. Robert Winston Ward.*



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February 17, 2024 at 02:39 PM



“ *Basket of Memories was purchased for the family of Dr. Robert Winston Ward.*



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February 05, 2024 at 02:28 PM

MS

“ *Juanna and family,  
Our Marion family just learned of Robert’s passing. Condolences to you and your girls! It’s been a long time since we’ve seen one another but I remember how lovely your family was. Jake (Scott) tried to keep us updated with Robert but after his passing no more contact.  
I pass by the home place in Sugar Grove often as two of my grandsons attend school at Aunt Marie’s stomping grounds! So many memories as I pass by ...my dad and mom (Preston and Mildred) checked on her on Sunday afternoons, and we were always treated with punch and dessert on little glass plates! Just wanted you to know we’ve thought of you and Robert often even though our paths haven’t crossed in years. If you ever come this direction I’d love to see you. Prayers of peace and comfort coming your way..  
Mary Preston (Scott) Stump*

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**Mary Preston Stump** - January 15, 2024 at 08:29 AM

HF

“ *I love you papa and miss you so much. I remember when I went on a field trip to an aircraft carrier that you had worked on and when I got home I was so curious about your work and travels. I loved hearing your memories and how much experience you’d had. We miss you so much papa. I love you.  
Love, Harper*

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**Harper Forbes** - December 28, 2023 at 03:03 PM

ZM

“ Papa,

*Thank you for all the political debates (I'll never forget our last conversation; it was about Israel and we finally agreed, sadly), the treasure trove of a library in the storage room of the basement (thank god you never sold those books), and the incalculable amount of wisdom you've given to your family that will help us all navigate this chaotic existence (except for your insistence that the central thermostat must always be at seventy-six degrees Fahrenheit).*

*We will all miss you deeply forever, Papa. Thank you for the home I was raised in for the latter half of my childhood, seriously. I actually mean it.*

*Love,*

*Zachary*

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**Zachary Myers** - December 24, 2023 at 08:43 PM

WM

“ *I love you Papa, love Will*

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**Will Meagher** - December 23, 2023 at 04:08 PM