



Robert Louis Pienkowski

August 22, 1932 - July 6, 2024

Bob was born on August 22, 1932, in Cleveland, Ohio, the second son of Oliver E. Pienkowski and Elaine Groh Pienkowski. His brother, from whom he learned quite a bit, was Edward Pienkowski of Elgin, IL. Bob grew up in Lakewood and Rocky River, Ohio - both suburbs of Cleveland. During those years, his mother took him to parks and on many bird watching expeditions. His mother encouraged him to love nature and allowed him to have snakes, insects and various creatures inside the house. Bob's Dad was gone from 1942-1946 during and after WWII as an electrical engineer to set up communications for the army. When his father returned home from the war, he encouraged Bob to join the Boy Scouts and took him on many hikes and camping trips.

Bob graduated from Ohio State University in 1954 with a B.S. in both Entomology and Zoology. During his college years he was a member of the R.O.T.C. and upon graduation entered the United States Army as a 2nd Lieutenant serving two years as a medical entomologist. His first assignment was with Dr. George Craig collecting mosquito larvae in Alaska. Bob took on this assignment heading out with nets over his head, arms held out fully exposed in a swarm of mosquitos, popping glass vials over the mosquitos as they bit his arms, all in the name of science and research. Bob gave his blood for his country to save future lives. He gathered species to see what chemicals or methods might be best employed to control their numbers and

curtail the spread of disease.

Following his military service, Bob began a graduate program in Entomology at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, studying the potato leafhopper. He studied under Dr. John Medler for both his M.S. (1958) and his Ph.D. (1961). In 1957 he met Joan “Joni” Kathryn Moore, daughter of Raymond King Moore and Olga Pauline Wigsмоen, at the Wesley Foundation where she was a hostess for the Sunday Night Suppers. They married in 1958. After Bob’s graduation, he was hired as an assistant professor at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. He and Joni moved to Blacksburg on the day after his dissertation defense in 1961. Bob began his career focusing on the ecology of alfalfa. He published over 70 scientific papers and attained the rank of full professor in 1971. He served as graduate student coordinator, even before such a position was formally established, and twice acted as interim department head.

Shortly after arriving in Blacksburg Bob and Joni visited churches and decided to join Blacksburg Presbyterian Church under the leadership of Dr. Ellison Smyth because of its stance on integration and the welcoming spirit of the congregation. Over the years Bob was elected Deacon, Elder, served on a variety of committees and taught many Sunday School classes.

Bob and Joni adopted three children: Sara Joy, Nathan Andrew and Samuel Yong. Sara, Nate and Sam all married in the same year, 1999. Sara married Franz Diemel and had two children, Sofie and Conrad; Nate married Brandy Salmon and had two children, Riley and Nataleigh; and Sam married Christy Kennedy and had two children, Haley and Logan. Bob and Joni enjoyed spending family vacations at Wrightsville Beach, NC, celebrating Thanksgiving dinners at the Cascades Falls, taking hikes around Blacksburg, and gathering with family and friends in their home.

Bob began his love of photography as a child working with his father in their home darkroom. His photographic eye was for the very small things in nature. His photographs were often incorporated into Joni's art.

He and Joni traveled extensively. Before he retired, he taught in Sri Lanka and China and traveled throughout Europe, the Middle East and Africa. He marveled at the diversity of marine life while snorkeling in the Caribbean; studied whales off the Baja Coast; explored the tropics of Costa Rica counting leatherback turtles and their eggs at night; and studied the glaciers of Alaska and Darwin's inspirations in the Galápagos Islands. Bob always loved his travels but would say that "coming home was the best part."

Bob dedicated his life to his family, faith, community and his career with a sense of humor about it all. He was a collector of puns and was capable of creating many original ones. He simplified a Samuel Butler quote by saying, Life is too important to be taken seriously.

A memorial service is scheduled for Saturday, August 31, 2024 at 2 p.m. at Blacksburg Presbyterian Church, 701 Church Street SE Blacksburg, VA officiated by Rev. Dr. Sarah Wiles. The family will receive friends immediately following the service in the church's Fellowship Hall.

In lieu of flowers, gifts may be made to Children's Home Society of VA (P.O. Box 6266 Richmond, VA 23230), Holt International Children's Services (250 Country Club Road, Eugene, OR 97401), or Blacksburg Presbyterian Church (701 Church Street SE, Blacksburg, VA 24060).

Previous Events

Memorial Service

AUG 31. 2:00 PM (ET)

Blacksburg Presbyterian Church
701 Church Street SE
Blacksburg, VA 24060

Tribute Wall

DA

“ I had one class with him for my Ph.D from 1974 to 1978 at Virginia Tech. He made me realize that there was much more to life than bugs in this world. I went on in medicine, pharmacology and nursing. I thank him for that advice. My condolences to his family...Dr. Ron Baer Ph.D, MS, MSN, CNSD, BS, BSN, RN, AAS...

Dr. Ron Baer Ph.D, M.S., MSN, BS, BSN, A - August 31, 2024 at 07:44 PM



“ Divine Peace Bouquet was purchased for the family of Robert Louis Pienkowski.



August 27, 2024 at 08:06 PM

KS

“ Joni, know you are being held in my heart as you remember Bob. You were both so wonderful to me during my years in Blacksburg. I remember you fondly.
Love and Prayers,
kelly m. sisson, baltimore, md

Kelly M. Sisson - July 12, 2024 at 07:23 PM

SL

I remember Dad saying he was on Bob & Jon's doorstep before they got home from BPC their first visit, he was so impressed. He & Bob connected over many things, including "bugs".

Bob & Joni were always cordial in hosting us when we were in Blacksburg. We have sketches Joni made of my parents and our children on our walls.

Our love goes out to you as you mourn & celebrate Bob's life this Saturday. To Joni and Sara, Nate & Sam, the latter remember for his Texas Pete sauce!

*Susan & Jim Lindenberger, Ru & Daniel
White Rock, British Columbia*

Susan Smyth Lindenberger - August 29, 2024 at 08:36 PM

NG

Bob's death deeply saddens me, Joni. My sisters and I have adored you and Bob from the time we first met you at a picnic in our yard; it was on the day when the two of you arrived in Blacksburg for Bob's new position with the entomology department. You have been wonderful friends to the Grayson family for all these many years. We have loved and admired both of you in so many ways.

Please know that I am holding you in my heart during this difficult time. I look forward to visiting you the next time I'm in Blacksburg--this coming spring, I hope.

*Nancy Grayson
Athens, Georgia*

Nancy Grayson - September 02, 2024 at 09:32 AM