

Sue Morrow: James S. Roberts left legacy of learning, love

BY SUE MORROW
FOR THE [NEVADA APPEAL](#),

Intellectual, educator, world traveler, accomplished musician, friend and, more importantly, beloved husband and father. Those words define longtime Carson City resident James S. "Jim" Roberts, who died Nov. 3 at the age of 86.

On Saturday, I attended a celebration of life for the retired University of Nevada political science professor along with an estimated 125 family members and friends at the Nevada State Library.

Jim was a lover of music with a particular fondness for folk songs and ballads which he sang at various gatherings, including in a number of countries where he was a visiting teacher. He was also an accomplished guitarist. He was renowned for his memory of thousands of songs, including those of his favorites, Gilbert and Sullivan. It was fitting that during Saturday's program, his niece and professional singer Margaret Roberts of Seattle sang "Without a Song."

Jim's sons Eric and Mark praised their father for his influence in their lives. He learned his "love of ideas, of the pursuit of knowledge, of being an academic, of books, of justice and peace," from his father, said Eric, a professor of computer science at Stanford University in Palo Alto, Calif.

Eric, who was at the hospital after the mid-term elections the day his father died, recalled how Jim, a staunch Democrat, had voted there earlier by absentee ballot.

"He was bound and determined to vote, and he did, and he was secure in the knowledge" that U.S. Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev. had won re-election.

Son Mark, a physician in Pennsylvania, recalled his father's observation that "Getting old would be interesting if it weren't happening to me."

An oft-used phrase in the face of adversity, said Mark, was "and this too will pass." So, as the pain over the loss of his "papa" will pass, Mark said, the memories won't.

Daughter Wendy of Sonoma, Calif., remembered road trips with her parents during which her father shared his love of knowledge. Wendy spoke of her father's love of gardening, tennis and dogs. "He seldom met a dog he didn't like, and no dog that didn't like him," she said.

Jim was proud of his Swedish heritage, and he and his wife Anne lived in that country from 1949-51.

Wendy called her brothers up to the podium, and in keeping with a Roberts family tradition for special occasions, they and the attendees were served small glasses filled with akvavit. The three then sang "Helan Gar" a song sung before tossing down the Swedish liqueur. Jim used to joke that the song was the "second Swedish national anthem."

I could have sworn I heard Jim singing along with them.

• Sue Morrow is a longtime journalist and member of the Nevada Newspaper Hall of Fame. She may be reached at soozymorrow@yahoo.com.

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