



Robert Neal Olson

March 28, 1951 - April 19, 2020

The day before Dad passed away was spent doing things he enjoyed most in life — gardening with his wife Lynne, reading through an Apollo 11 “maintenance manual,” and attending to the needs of the resident squirrels and birds.

Though his family is spread out across the country, we had come together just the week before for an online trivia night in which Dad was more concerned about asking questions that would make us laugh than being given correct answers. We are now so grateful to have had that chance to see him and to hear his voice one last time.

Dad, Robert Neal Olson, was born in Salt Lake City, Utah to MaeBelle “Tommy” Hadley Olson and Robert Theodore Olson. He received his Bachelor of Science degree in Biology from the University of Utah in 1973. In his early years, Dad was a keen fisherman, sportsman and a member of the Mountain Men of the Wasatch. He met Lynne, the love of his life, in 1976 and married later that same year.

Dad spent the majority of his career with the State of Utah in the Department of Environmental Quality, Division of Air Quality. Recognized as an expert in his field, Dad co-authored numerous articles and gave many conference presentations. But his most notable professional claim-to-fame was for his valiant escape from a hot air balloon that made an emergency landing while he was collecting air samples in 1993. Dad hung up his lab coat in 2013 to spend more time with family and friends. He enjoyed working in his beloved garden, reading about presidential history, and perfecting his Swedish Chef impression.

It is no cliché to say that Neal was a Renaissance Man. His handiwork as a craftsman, woodworker, engineer, winemaker, and builder is on display in every detail of his home and garden. Dad was a natural musician and artist. He made beautiful musical instruments and delicious artisan breads. But most of all, Dad loved to put his multiple talents and skills to use — without ever expecting or wishing for recognition — in support of his family’s diverse projects and activities. He built a perfect scale model of the Hidden

Hollow Nature Preserve for the KOPE Kids to use as they campaigned to conserve the park. He took beautiful photographs of the Draw at Sugar House to publicize the monumental public artwork. He helped to build a new enclosure for his sister-in-law's ducks when they relocated to Salt Lake City. Dad's generous spirit extended beyond his family. He would often lend tools to neighbors and volunteer to plow their sidewalks in the winter. His hallmark attitude was always "Here and happy to help."

Dad was preceded in death recently by his sweet dog Pica, and is survived by us, his son Billie (Michelle) and their two sons; his daughters Katie (Tom) and Cassie (Josh); his wife Frances Lynne Carlson Olson; and by his sister Marie Reiter and brother Jim (Nancy) Olson and their families.

Neal was a great man—a big man with a huge laugh and a gigantic heart. He could be a candid critic, but always our biggest fan and cheerleader. He was our family's unfailing champion and our partner in crime. He was an unconvincing curmudgeon and a proud grandpa to Riley and Grady. He leaves an enormous hole in our world. But we know that it will be filled by following his example and by honoring his legacy of selfless service and love.

Due to the current circumstances, a memorial celebration of Neal's life will be held at a future date.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests donations be made to Perseverance Ranch Equine Sanctuary in Kanab, Utah, or a tree be planted in his honor.