

FRANCH, Robert Henry, MD

Dr. Robert "Bob" Franch passed away peacefully at home in Atlanta, Georgia on November 10, 2020, with his children at his side. He was 93 years old.

A professor emeritus of cardiology at Emory University School of Medicine, Bob was also a loving family man and dear friend to many.

His career in medicine spanned 41 years. An early leader in the field of congenital heart disease, he headed Georgia's first pediatric catheterization lab, trained several generations of cardiologists, cared for and comforted his patients and their families, and enjoyed the camaraderie of his incredibly talented colleagues. His family is proud of the two Lifetime Achievement awards he received: the 2006 Atlanta Business Chronicle Health-Care Heroes Lifetime Achievement Award for contributions to the field of pediatric cardiology and exceptional bedside manner; and the 2011 Georgia Chapter of the American College of Cardiology Lifetime Achievement Award.

Bob was born in a coal camp near Bessemer, Michigan in 1927, the first child of August and Enrica Franch. His parents, raised in the village of Cloz in the Val di Non, provided a loving home steeped in the language and customs of Trentino-Alto Adige. In 1928, the Franch family moved to the mining town of Gebo, Wyoming, where young Bob spent his childhood hunting rabbits, venturing into the mine with his father, and attending school in a one-room schoolhouse. His sister, Mary Ann, was born in 1933. After the mine closed, the Franch family moved to Lafayette, Colorado where Bob experienced his first library and "movie house."

A proud Colorado Buffalo, he attended college (class of 1948) and medical school (class of 1952) at the University of Colorado, Boulder, thanks to the generous support of the Boettcher Foundation. When Bob entered college at age 16, World War II was raging. At age 18, he took a leave of absence from school, enlisting and serving in the Navy during the last months of the war and the immediate aftermath.

After medical school, he completed his residency in internal medicine at the University of Cincinnati School of Medicine, Cincinnati General Hospital. Drawn to Emory University to study cardiology with Dr. Noble Fowler (Grady Hospital), he also met his future wife Haroldina ("Dina") Lee. He completed his fellowship in cardiology in 1957 and married Dina in 1958.

Over the next decade, his family quickly grew with the birth of seven children. The family of nine shared many raucous Sunday dinners and outings. Bob cherished the month of August, when he would take his annual vacation, fearlessly packing up the kids for destinations far and near. After the death of his wife in 1995, Bob continued his passion for travel and culture with his dearest friend Mary Wagner. Mary and her children and grandchildren brought great joy to Bob and the entire Franch family.

Bob was a lifelong learner; he taught his children to value education, curiosity, dedication to work, and humor. When he wasn't working or traveling, his children and grandchildren kept him busy. He enthusiastically celebrated dozens of graduations, danced at many weddings, and cheered on countless athletic and artistic performances. He lived with faith, optimism, and charity. We will miss him very much, but our sadness is eclipsed by the happiness and love we feel when we think of him.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Haroldina Lee Franch. He is survived by his sister, Mary Ann Franch, and his seven children: Katherine Franch (Matt McKenna), Robert Franch Jr., Harold Franch (Vicki Harrington Franch), Dina Franch (Jerzy Procinski), Franja Franch; Mary Lisa Henry (Jeff Henry), and Andrew Franch (Hannah Kim). He is also survived by his nine grandchildren: Shannon McKenna, Gregory McKenna, Carolina Toth, Michael Franch, James Franch, Travis Franch, Megan Sonner, Mary Katherine Henry, and Madeline Franch; and his two great-grandchildren: Miro Toth and Liana Toth.

Due to the on-going pandemic, a private funeral mass will be held in December and a memorial celebration in 2021. In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to the Franch Learning Center at Emory University, Division of Cardiology. A check may be made payable to "Emory" and mailed to Emory University, c/o Emory Advancement, 1762 Clifton Road NE, Ste 1400, Atlanta, GA 30322.