

Obituary for Robert Long-Wen Chen

Dr. Robert L.W. Chen of Atlanta, Georgia passed away on Friday, March 24, 2019. He was born in Shanghai, China in 1925 to Yu Gwang Chen and Ming Bau, the oldest of five siblings. Dr. Chen's father was Nanjing University's president. He grew up next door to Pearl Buck, during a tumultuous time in China--during the second Sino-Japan War and World War II and moved with his family during the Japanese occupation of China. He attended Nanjing University and obtained his bachelor's degree in Physics and Philosophy. As a young man he served as a translator for the United States Army in China during World War II. In 1949, Dr. Chen moved to the Philippines when the Communist Party overtook the Nationalist Party government formerly led by Chiang Kai-Shek.

In 1953, Dr. Chen came to America to pursue his PhD in Physics at Syracuse University. Syracuse was specifically chosen so he would have the chance to study under Albert Einstein's research assistant, Peter Bergmann, who is known for his work with Einstein on unified field theory encompassing all physical interactions. Dr. Chen's specialty was in plasma physics and quantum mechanics.

From 1963 to 1964, Dr. Chen was a physicist for NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies at Columbia University in New York City. Moving to Atlanta in 1964, he joined Emory University's Physics Department faculty where he happily stayed for 41 years. He earned the Sigma Xi award for Most Distinguished Research in 1967. Even after his official retirement, Dr. Chen continued to inhabit an office at Emory, believing that intellectual stimulation was key to his longevity and mental sharpness.

He met his future wife, Jean Huang, during his studies and married in 1958 in Ithaca, New York. Robert and Jean welcomed their first daughter, Selena Chen in 1963, and their second daughter, Estella Quin, was born in 1968. He retired from Emory in 2006, but maintained an active life in caring for his wife, Jean and continuing to be a steadfast, guiding presence for his daughters. He was preceded in death by Jean, who passed away in 2018. Dr. Chen is survived by his daughters Selena and Estella; and his grandsons, Trevor, Lachlan, and Peter. There will be a simple burial at Floral Hills Memory Garden, 3150 Lawrenceville Highway, Tucker, Georgia 30084 on Saturday, June 15, 2019 at 11:00 am. There will also be a memorial service in the future, the date and time to be announced.

Robert Chen was many things throughout his long life--son, brother, husband, father, grandfather, scholar, teacher, and philosopher. Most important to him though were being a husband, father, and grandfather. He delighted in Handel's Messiah, Carl Jung, and discussing the politics of the day or the deeper meaning of life. He was a role model in optimism, faithfulness, self-discipline and adaptability. He was the protective patriarch of the family and will be dearly missed.

If you would like to contact the family, you may call Estella at 770-377-1033 or email: echen1@kennesaw.edu.