

The Honorable Robert S. Gardner, Benton County, Oregon Circuit Court Judge for 25 years died August 16, 2021 of pancreatic cancer at age 79. Rob was surrounded in his final days in his home in Sierra Vista, Arizona by all his treasured family: Millicent, his beloved wife of 56 years, son Kenneth of Santa Fe, New Mexico, son Steven and his wife Eriko and their children, Miya and Theo of Seattle, Washington and son Matthew and his wife Anne and their children Evelyn, Eleanor, and Cullen of Minneapolis, Minnesota.

A wonderful husband, father, grandfather, friend and colleague, Rob was born January 14, 1942 in Upper Darby, Pennsylvania to Matthew Gardner, who immigrated to the United States from Northern Ireland at the age of 17 and May (Killough) Gardner, also of direct Irish heritage.

He graduated from Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, where he met his future wife, Millicent Anne Young. There he excelled in track and cross country. He attended The University of Pennsylvania Law School and during that time he and Millicent married.

It was the Vietnam era and after graduating from law school Rob was commissioned an officer in the United States Marine Corps. After Basic Training he was assigned to the Judge Advocate General Corps (JAG), and later appointed a military judge. His first two sons, Kenneth and Steven, were born while at Marine

Corps Base Quantico (Virginia) where he and Millicent lived in a small, all-metal “Lustron” house. When his active duty with the Marine Corps was over, the family moved in 1970 to Portland, Oregon where he worked as a Deputy District Attorney for Multnomah County. Rob continued in the Marine Corps Reserve, retiring with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

After four years in Portland the family moved in 1974 to Corvallis, Oregon where Rob worked as an attorney with the law firm of Ringo Walton Eves and Gardner. In 1976 his third son, Matthew, was born. He left the firm when he was appointed and then elected Circuit Court Judge for Benton County in 1982. He was continuously reelected and worked with commitment and dedication. His colleagues and friends will say that he served the legal community with justice, integrity, and compassion. They also will say that he had a great sense of humor. After retiring as a judge, Rob continued to work as an arbitrator and mediator, often putting in herculean efforts to get two parties to come to some agreement. Rob served on numerous boards over the years and was a member of Rotary.

He was an avid gardener at his historic farmhouse property, just outside of Corvallis, where he and Millicent lived for 45 years. They had bought the property in 1975 and it was a joy to have gardens, sheep, orchards and every kind of berry one can imagine. He always liked hard physical work, and his idea of a good time was to split a cord of firewood in a cold January drizzle. The never-ending work

at the property kept him physically fit and he continued to finish his exercise workouts with 10 chin-ups up until the cancer had sapped his strength. Rob enjoyed helping his sons with their house projects which they saved up for his visits and enthusiastically doled out in great quantity. He was busy helping his middle son Steve with one of his architectural art installations, hoisting aluminum and glass panels into place, as he was experiencing stomach and back pain from his pancreatic cancer.

During retirement Rob and Millicent returned twice every year to Northern Ireland to spend several weeks in the house that his father had owned, visiting relatives and friends there and exploring the beautiful countryside. He became adept at driving on the left “wrong” side of the road. His sons and their families sometimes joined them on these trips, as did other relatives and friends. One memorable time was three years ago when Rob and Millicent took two of their granddaughters (11 and 13) to the house for a week of local Irish adventures.

Other treasured traditions included “Camp Corvallis” time in the summer when all his sons and their families traveled to stay at the family homestead and he would teach the city grandkids to feed the sheep, pick blackberries, make cider and harvest the corn moments before going into the pot (on this he was rather inflexible). Every winter was “Gardner Gather up Time” when the whole family would travel from the various states where they lived to someplace warm and

sunny, often outside the United States for the cousins and siblings to be together.

Rob always performed his grandfatherly duties with enthusiasm – bouncing young ones to sleep or wrestling with the larger kids and throwing them into the water.

When the ceaseless battle against the blackberries and the never-ending labor of the farm became more work than joy, Rob and Millicent traded the rain of Oregon for the sun of Arizona and relocated to Sierra Vista for a new adventure.

He was a longtime member of Calvin Presbyterian Church, Corvallis, Oregon. He truly cared about others and made many, many regular visits to elderly friends, called people he knew who were ill, and helped others he came in contact with which led to many long-term friendships.

A treasured Bible verse of his was: “What does the Lord require of us but to do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.” Micah 6:8

Rob is predeceased by his sister Jane Gardner Connor of South Carolina and his parents. He is lovingly remembered by his wife, children and their spouses, grandchildren, brother-in-law Kenneth Connor and his children, brother-in-law and sister-in-law Philip and Sandra Young and their children, and longtime friends and cousins in the United States and in Northern Ireland and Scotland.