

Roy Woolsey



Born: July 23, 1917, Pasadena

Died: Aug. 28, 2007, Newport Beach

Survivors: Wife, Louise; son, Roy Jr.; daughter, Barbara Nordstrom; brother, Robert; grandson, Eric Nordstrom

Services: 4 p.m. Tuesday, St. Andrews Presbyterian Church, Newport Beach.

Donations: Newport Beach Sunrise Rotary Foundation, P.O. Box 8113, Newport Beach, CA 92658.

Sunday, September 2, 2007

He sailed through life

Newport Beach attorney Roy Woolsey had a zest for adventure.

By ROBIN HINCH
The Orange County Register

There's a plaque on the wall of Roy Woolsey's office that says, "I've spent most of my life sailing. The rest, I've wasted,"

Well, yes and no.

It's true that he really loved sailing and had owned and raced a Lido 14 for the past 50 years. But no one would say that Roy, who was 90 when he died Aug. 28, had wasted even a day of the rest of his life.

This was a man who savored everything from a bowl of ice cream after dinner to swinging, on his 80th birthday, from a 30-foot-high Club Med trapeze on a Caribbean island.

He was a lawyer who found joy in researching a case and a traveler who rejoiced at the discovery of a thicket of fresh blackberries on a nature hike. Roy even marveled at his administrative assistant's computer abilities at formatting a text in Word.

Born in Pasadena, he grew up in Gardena and entered UCLA in 1935 where, he said, "the biggest event" was meeting Louise Jones at a dance. They married in 1941.

In 1939, Roy entered USC Law School and was commissioned an ensign in the Navy Supply Corps in 1942.

After the war, he worked for the law firm of O'Melveny & Myers and in 1952 bought a beach house on Lido Isle. Eight years later, Roy opened law offices in Newport Beach and Costa Mesa, and he and Louise made Lido Isle their permanent home.

Roy started sailing even before they moved to Lido Isle. He and friends rented a boat there one day and the attendant asked, "Which of you knows how to sail?" Roy had read a book on it so raised his hand.

Soon after, he bought a Lido 14 sailboat and took up the sport with a vengeance. Later, he switched to the smaller, faster, one-man Laser, largely because he had trouble finding people to crew for him.

Competitive by nature, he sailed in his first Lido 14 National Championship race in 1958, with his then-13-year-old son, Roy Jr., as his crew. Roy competed nearly every year after that, even entering the Lido 14 National Championship Regatta – again, with Roy Jr. – just a few days before he died.

Roy was such an active and dedicated member of the Lido Isle Yacht Club that the annual Roy B. Woolsey Regatta was inaugurated in 2000.

But sailing wasn't Roy's only interest. His general zeal for life had him learning how to use the earliest computers, rafting down the Colorado River, scuba diving in the Red Sea and doing endless research in preparation for his legal cases, most of which involved wills and estates.

When his grandson, Eric, said that having a successful lawyer for a grandfather made him feel pressured to do something great, Roy said, "You should do something great. But not for that reason. Just believe in yourself and know that you are great."

Genial and outgoing, he was incredibly kind, treating everyone as a friend and wanting to stop for each stranded motorist he saw. He was also a perennial optimist, finding a good side to most things in life.

His home office was a model of disorganization that signaled both Roy's many interests and his good intentions. In one thick file from a 1957 case, for instance, there were letters showing the lengths he went to to find the address of a woman about whom he'd received flattering letters of reference. He wanted very much to send them to her.

There were also boxes of magazines, stock prospectuses and other papers that he'd meant to read, along with files containing voluminous notes he'd typed about things of interest, such as bridge and how to improve his game.

Although Roy played and sailed to win, it didn't really bother him when he didn't.

Still, he was pleased when, the day before his 90th birthday, he and his crew, daughter Barbara Nordstrom, took a first in an American Legion Yacht Club race off the Balboa Peninsula.

No need to tell anyone, he joked to Barbara, that there were only two boats in the race.

Interviewed for this story: Son, Roy Jr.; daughter, Barbara; grandson, Eric; administrative assistant, Karyn Greene.

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