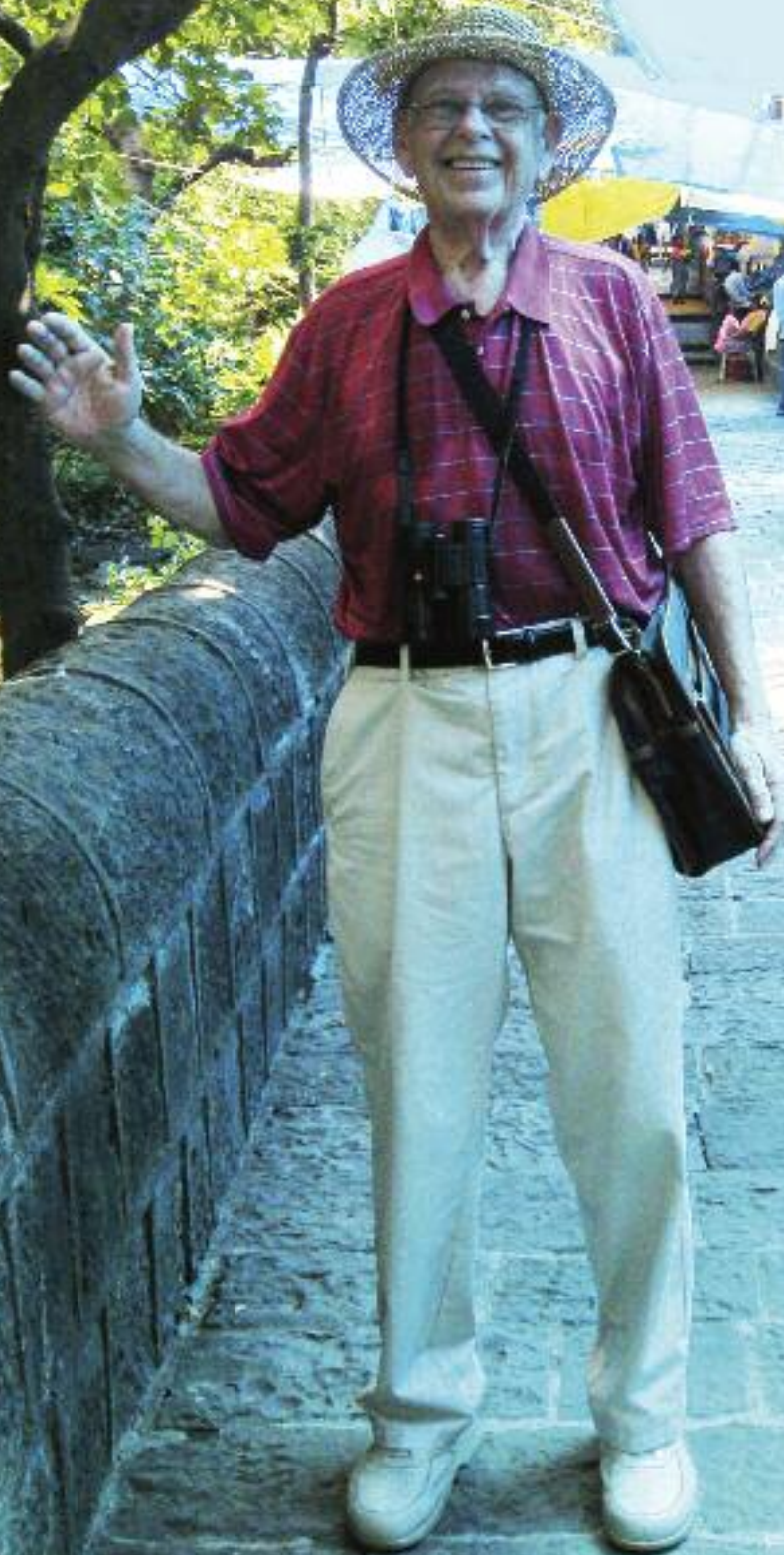


Mid~Atlantic Koi

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*Founding Member
of MAKC*



L to R: Lester Berkow, grandson Kayden, and wife Rhoda

Editor's Note: this was the speech given to all gathered in memory of Lester Berkow, by his son, Sam Berkow, at Boca Pointe, Florida on May 16, 2010.

On behalf of my entire family—my mom Rhoda, my sister Joanne and all of our families—I want to thank all of you for gathering here, to remember my father, Lester Berkow.

As you all know, this past week, we held a funeral for my father in Metuchen New Jersey. Metuchen is the town where we lived before my parents retired here in Boca Raton. Today, we are gathered here at Boca Pointe, where my parents have lived for the past 18 years, to look back at my dad's life, and remember the things that made him special.

As most of you know, my dad was not a simple guy. It's sort of funny because he liked to think he was a casual & simple guy, but as you all well know, he was anything but casual & simple. You can see what I mean by this if you look at the way my dad approached his many 'hobbies'....

My dad had a number of interests that filled his life beyond his commitment to his family and his career in medicine. Following an early retirement from his practice as an OB-GYN, my dad's days were filled with Koi-fish, bird watching, growing orchids, tennis, Civil War history and spending time with his many friends to name a few things. His approach to each of these 'hobbies' was neither casual nor simple. Even something as mundane as picking a restaurant was not simple for my dad. As many of you know, deciding where to have dinner could be a circuitous process for my dad, something that always made us laugh.

Once interested in a 'hobby,' my dad would delve deeply into the topic; reading, researching, asking probing questions and even writing articles. As those of you who spent time discussing bird watching, Koi, American History or orchids with him know, his knowledge of these areas would hardly be called

Lester H. Berkow Memorial Notes

by Sam Berkow, California

casual. My dad's unending curiosity and his ability to both gain real sights and retain information, made him an amazingly successful bird watcher, orchid grower and Koi keeper/judge to name a few of his interests. Having achieved the necessary ranking to judge Koi shows both here and in Japan, my dad was able to discern the complexities of Koi markings so subtle that most of us never had a clue what he was actually looking at or discerning!

Sometimes, the depth of my dad's commitment to his hobbies had unintended, strange or even wonderful results – such as my mom finding herself accompanying my dad on a Koi trip and being trapped for two days in a small snowed-in mountain village in Japan, living on 'real' Japanese food and sake. Or any number of people, many gathered here today, fearing for their safety as my dad drove on both high-ways and byways, while pointing out and carefully watching an 'interesting' bird. This made bird watching a white-knuckle sport for my dad's passengers and enabled me and many of my dad's closest friends to join him for visits to garbage dumps and various swamps from New Jersey to California, in the hope of spotting an 'interesting' or rare bird.

A 'wonderful' result of my dad's orchid hobby is the large collection of orchids spread around my parent's home. There were always a few dozen 'interesting' orchids or bromeliads that my dad loved to point out to visitors. As my dad's interest in orchids expanded, so did the number of plantings around and in my parents home, which has taken on the subtle beauty of a Balinese rain forest in full bloom.

The common cliché goes that behind every great man is a greater woman. There is no disagreement about this in our family. I think everyone gathered here would agree that without my mom, Rhoda, my dad would have spent most of his time looking for his car keys or any number of phone numbers, or the check book or the name of the guy who you know, did the thing for your friend who, Rhoda, you know, lived in the place, you know, who owned the pond with the thing... My mom brought organization and order into my dad's life. This year will mark my parents 50th anniversary. Not bad for two young kids who got married on their 7th date. Watching my mom hold my dad's hand and enduring the mood swings and difficult times that cancer brought with it during the past year, it's easy to see that theirs is a special marriage, with each of them bringing a rare sense of love & commitment to the past 49 years.





Judges at Koi America 2007 – L to R: Peter Ponzio, Pat Christensen, Lester Berkow, Jan Thompson, and Larry Christensen

What many of you don't know is that many of my dad's interests were a result of my mom's actions. I'd venture that few of you would have known that it was my mom who introduced Koi into our family. Having read that keeping a fish tank might help reduce blood pressure and stress, my mom set out to get a tank for my dad, and put it in the living room. What started out as my mom's idea to buy a fish tank, escalated, first as a small indoor tank, then a larger indoor tank, then a small outdoor pond behind our home in Metuchen, and grew into a full home renovation project, including a new backyard deck, a modified kitchen, a large water filtration system, bulldozers, cranes and a Koi pond with a waterfall larger than anyone expected! My dad proudly named the pond (only half jokingly) Lovely Lake Lester, located at the foot of Bori Falls (a nod to my uncle Bori who lived across the street). This is another example of that old saying: "Behind every great man...."

My dad belonged to several social groups, but he was especially proud of two, the Bums and Joel's Jolly Jocks, or as he liked to say, "his old friends and his new friends." The Bums are a group of friends from Perth Amboy, made up of guys who grew up together. Many of my dad's closest friends are Bums (the name Bums came from my dad's mom, Grandma E's name for the group when they were young). Their annual trip to Las Vegas requires a years worth of phone calls, and now emails, all to settle matters, all long since agreed upon. Joel's tennis group is a mainstay here at Boca Pointe. In each group, my dad had friends who shared his passion for life, and he liked to tell the same old stories of the Bums and later the Jocks, over and over, laughing



Lester was a guest speaker at many Koi events.

as though it was the first time hearing or telling the tale. It wasn't until I was in my 40's that I was allowed to join the Bums in Las Vegas for their annual outing – and when I pointed out that the guys' late night out ended before 10:30 pm my dad responded without missing a beat, 'Don't tell your mom. I told her we'd be in bed by 10.' Being an active member of both of these groups for so many years, speaks to my dad's commitment to a sense of community in his and our lives. My dad's interest in his kids and Grandkids, especially Grandkids (Andrew, EJ & Kayden) can not be over stated. Nothing made my dad happier than to hear about any of either my or my sister's, or our kids' days, recent activities or accomplishments. His sense of joy in all of us was uplifting.

Lester Berkow, continued on page 8



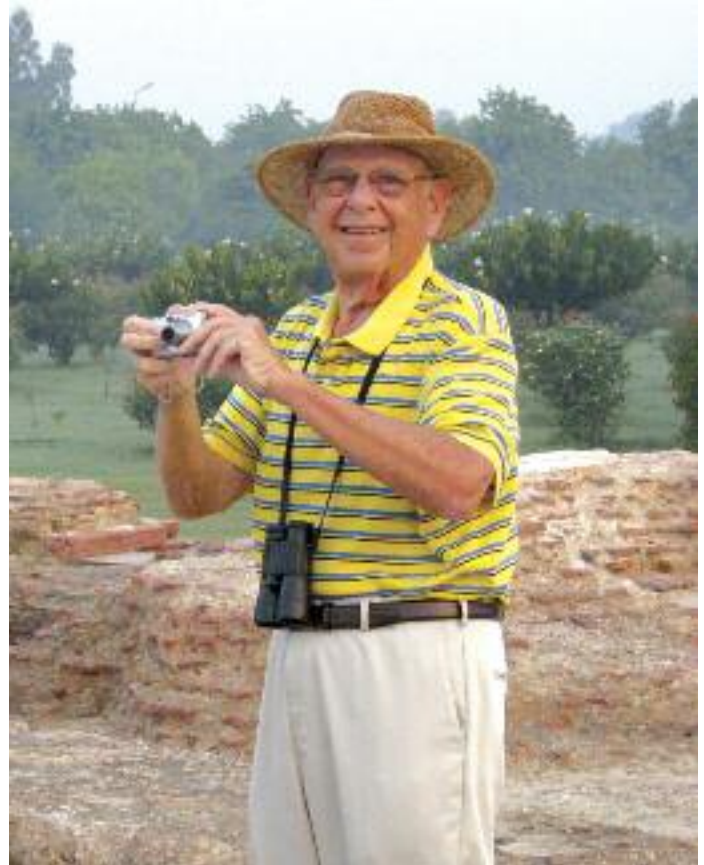
My dad's commitment to community and philanthropic ideals extended in many directions. One was Perth Amboy Hospital (now Raritan Bay Medical Center) where he worked for more than 20 years and served as Head of the Medical Staff for 12, and where with some help from my Aunt Irene, the Labor and Delivery floor my dad worked on is named in my Grandfather's memory. Other causes my dad supported included: The Jewish Federation and UJA (which although he was a casual Jew in terms of daily practice, he strongly supported Israel and Jewish causes). He also supported Planned Parenthood and Environmental Groups such as the World Wildlife Fund.

Most recently my dad became a supporter of Hospice by the Sea and the Hospice movement in general. His commitment to helping people understand the role that Hospice can and did play in helping him and our family deal with his illness, extended as far as to making a video to encourage others to learn more about the services that Hospice provides.

My parents' commitment to their community both here in Boca, in the Northeast and among their widely scattered friends, was also clearly visible when so many of you provided them with love and support this past year while fighting cancer. There is no way for my family to ever thank you all for the love and kindness that so many of you shared with my dad during this difficult time, other for me to get up here and to say a truly heartfelt – Thank you. I hope you know how much your collective kindness meant to both my dad, my mom, and to the rest of our family.

As many of you know, I had a complicated relationship with my dad. It wasn't until later in my life that the two of us really started to bond. This was evident to both of us in the months before the birth of my own son, Kayden. I would find myself calling my dad daily to tell him all of the little nuances of Toby's pregnancy and then later on with all of the little things that Kayden did each day that amazed me. My dad and my sister, the mom of two great kids herself, were delighted and had a great time both supporting and making fun of me. We all laughed a lot about the joys and challenges of parenthood.

A real treat for both my dad's life and mine was our trip to India last October. My dad's life long wish was always to travel to India – a place my mom was not as eager to visit. After my dad was diagnosed with cancer and went through his surgery and rounds of treatment, he pulled together to join me on a wonderful adventure. I had never seen my dad more excited about travel and he was increasingly active as we ventured far off the beaten path to see the 'real India' including Hindu and Jain Temples, amazingly spicy foods, dirty streets, freely roaming water buffalo, elephants and camel carts. We visited a number of remote villages and even chased exotic birds. It was truly a journey that I will never forget.



Lester in India

In closing, I'd like to share a remembrance that struck me as truly capturing my dad's nature. We were living here in Metuchen, and I was coming home rather late, around 4am – and as I got home, my dad was leaving to go deliver a baby. Not being thrilled with me coming home so late, my dad reluctantly said "Come on, take a ride to the Hospital with me and we'll grab breakfast on the way home." When my sister and I were young kids, going to hospital was a great thrill (we got to stay up late watching TV in the doctors lounge if the delivery took longer than expected). So I went along. Upon arriving at the hospital, my dad asked if I wanted to watch the delivery. I did and I was amazed. A birth is a very messy but thrilling thing for a very tired 17 year old to see. As we left just after dawn, we were walking down the back stairs the hospital, I said, "That was amazing! WOW! Do you still get a thrill each time you deliver a baby?" My dad quickly responded, "Sam, I do this several times a week, its 'gotta be 3 or 4 thousand kids that I've delivered already, how much of a thrill could it be –?" Then he paused, stopped walking down the stairs looked at me and said, "You know what, actually, every delivery is still a bit of a thrill. It's really a nice moment for everyone involved, and I really do enjoy being part of it. I hope you'll find a career that gives you that sense of joy as well."

As the weeks and months pass, I hope my dad is remembered for bringing those moments of joy to all of you, and you'll smile when you remember him and think of those joyful moments. Thank you all for coming. ❖

Lester's Legacy Lives!

by Susan Boland & Wayne Orchard, Virginia

Lester Berkow, a founding member of the Mid-Atlantic Koi Club passed away on May 8, 2010, after a heroic fight against pancreatic cancer. As we celebrate MAKC's 24th year, it is with both sadness and joy that we reminisce about Lester ... and his legacy in the Koi world.

As we learned at Lester's remembrance service, Rhoda is responsible for introducing Lester to fish keeping. As with all his hobbies, Lester was a thirsty sponge for any and all information on Koi keeping. In 1986, Lester joined with John File, Joe Zuritsky, Betty Roemer and others to form an organization to disseminate Koi information in the Mid-Atlantic region and, as they say, the rest is history.. The Mid-Atlantic Koi Club was born in 1986; Lester and Rhoda hosted the third meeting at their home in Metuchen, New Jersey.

In 1990, Lester was our North Chapter Vice-President. After retiring to Florida in 1991, Lester remained an active MAKC member and was an inspiring force for 24 years. Lester was a proponent at our very first Koi auction in John File's Philadelphia backyard in 1988. Lester competed at MAKC's very first Koi show at Lilypons Water Gardens. At this first show in 1989, although Joe Zuritsky's Sanke won Grand Champion, Lester's ZNA So. Cal Award winning Kohaku's trophy was taller...something Lester never let Joe forget! <smile> In 1998, Lester was co-chair with Bill Fogle and Jim Reilly for MAKC's 10th Annual Koi Show at Longwood Gardens. Even after retiring to Florida, Lester and Rhoda looked forward each year to MAKC's show... to visit Koi friends and to enjoy the competition. Lester and Rhoda helped at nearly every MAKC show over the past 20 years.

When Lester retired to Florida, it was only a matter of time until Koi became a part of "Camp Berkow," as they affectionately call their home in Boca Raton. Of course, Lester sought out local Koi people. Thereafter, these folks formed the Tropical Koi Club of South Florida.

Lester also loved to travel to judge Koi Shows. He loved the competition between the show winners and he loved teaching and encouraging new hobbyists everywhere. Lester was certified as an Associated Koi Club's of America (AKCA) judge in 1998 was one of his proudest accomplishments. He judged shows throughout the United States as well as England and Taiwan.



Lester was proud of his "Sanke" cat, after all it was red (orange) and white with black spots!

With everything that Lester contributed to Koi keeping, he will probably be remembered best for passing his infectious enthusiasm for Koi to everyone he met. At this, he excelled. Lester was a teller of tales. He told them often. Even if you had heard the tale before ... maybe more than once ... Lester could mesmerize you with it again.

Thank you, Lester, for all your contributions to the Koi hobby. Your legacy lives on in MAKC, the Tropical Koi Club and in every hobbyist you inspired to be a keeper of Koi! ❖

