

## Robert Carstens

November 12, 1936 - October 29, 2018

Robert Carstens, known as Bob to family, friends, and work associates, passed away at age 81 on October 29, 2018. He was born in Detroit, MI to parents Catherine and Aldor Carstens. He grew up in Grosse Pointe Farms, a suburb of Detroit. There he attended school until the age of 16.

Not wanting to waste the effort of higher education only to become “cannon fodder”, he convinced his father to sign off so that he could join the Marines at the age of 17, and worked on aircraft while stationed in Korea and Japan. While there, he became fascinated with Japanese language and culture. Studying and practicing Japanese became a lifelong hobby.

After discharge Bob began his higher education at Ferris State, continuing on at the University of Michigan, receiving a B.A. in Far Eastern Language and Literature. Working to put himself through college, he took a job as a janitor at a special education facility. While working there, he found himself spending time with the kids, including reading J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* and *Lord of the Rings* to them in the evenings. These interactions inspired him to change his career direction and obtain a Masters degree in Special Education for the Emotionally Impaired from the University of Michigan.

After graduation, he first worked at U of M Children’s Psychiatric Hospital in Ann Arbor. Upon moving to Traverse City, he taught at Arnell Engstrom

School for 12 years. The school was a part of the former State Hospital, now known as the Grand Traverse Commons. After the state hospital was closed, he found a new professional home at the TBAISD Adult Work Center, where he worked for 20 years. Bob put an amazing amount of care and energy into his job as a teacher of mentally and emotionally impaired young adults, both in and out of the classroom. It was not uncommon for him to go running or skiing with a group of students after school to prepare them for the Michigan Special Olympics, for which he was a volunteer coach. Of his long career with TBA, Bob was quoted: "My job has been to provide youth with opportunities to acquire knowledge, skills, and habits that will enable them to live productive and fulfilling lives, independently, in their community. To this end, I utilize cooperative learning, the thinking and principles of author and educator Barbara Coloroso, and Special Olympics."

Bob always had an interest in nature that stretched back to his formative years in Grosse Pointe Farms, at a time when it was on the edge of the city. He enjoyed the open countryside and interactions with nature for a few short years. Then urban sprawl took over and completely changed the character of the area, a change which deeply disappointed him.

Bob's interest in nature was rekindled in the late 70's. What started as a simple way to leave the stress of work behind, birding became a lifelong hobby and passion. He joined the Audubon club and was soon participating in bird counts around the county. He contributed greatly to the Michigan Breeding Bird Atlas for decades. In the 90's Bob served on the Audubon Club's board, as President, and as Vice President for Environment. He also joined the Northern Michigan Environmental Action Council. He was particularly proud of his involvement in surveying the wildlife at Grand Traverse Commons. The team found over 110 species of birds on the property, which helped show its value as wildlife habitat. Bob felt that preserving the open spaces on the grounds would also enhance the quality of

life for area residents.

After his retirement from teaching, he turned his full attention to conservation matters. He worked to preserve natural areas for future generations in a number of ways beyond birding. He served on the Michigan DNR Frog and Toad Survey for 10+ years. He monitored water quality for five stream watersheds. His interest in conservation led him to serve on a number of committees and boards involved in land use, transportation, and preservation of farmland and natural areas. This included the TC-TALUS and Grand Vision committee, the Acme Township Planning Commission, and Grand Traverse County Planning Commission. His dedication and accomplishments in planning and conservation were recognized in the form of numerous awards such as the NMEAC Clarence Kroupa Lifetime Achievement and Environmentalist of the Year awards in 2000, 2002 Grand Traverse Land Conservancy Volunteer of the Year, 2010 Frank Purvis Stewardship Award for Citizen Planning, and 2011 Distinguished Citizen Planner Award.

Bob's efforts to document the wildlife in various natural areas were often written about in articles in local magazines and newspapers. In an article in the Outlook magazine, July 2005, Bob was quoted as saying, "These natural areas are such fantastic assets to have in our community. People will look back someday and thank us for our foresight in preserving them." This one quote really sums up Bob's motivation behind all his conservation efforts in the region.

Bob's other interests included reading avidly (especially philosophy and science fiction), woodworking, listening to classical music, studying and practicing Japanese, and singing and playing folks songs on his guitar.

Bob is survived by two daughters, Heather Foxman and Megan Carstens, who

reside in Madison, WI. Sisters Marilyn and Kathleen preceded him in death, and he is survived by sisters Carol and Judy.

Bob would have liked people to honor his memory by getting outside and enjoying the beauty of nature. Also, please vote and consider getting involved in local efforts to protect the natural beauty and resources of the Grand Traverse area. A private memorial was held in November. Bob's daughters cordially invite you to share your memories and stories using this online forum

# Tribute Wall



“ *Robert Carstens*

January 30, 2023 at 04:02 AM



“ *Robert Carstens*

January 30, 2023 at 01:03 AM



“ *I'm sorry to hear this! I went on some 4-H biking and birdwatching adventures with him along with my brother. I remember spotting a Canadian warbler! I drew pictures of the birds we saw. I remember his story about how a great horned owl can tear the spine out of a deer. He knew so much about nature and influenced my own love for it. My condolences to the family.*

Joanna (Amren) Henson - June 18, 2019 at 08:36 PM



“ *I'm so sorry to hear of Bob's passing! I met him years ago in 2002 when I just started working at The Watershed Center. We worked on various projects together throughout the years and I always enjoyed talking with him about all kinds of subjects (including water protection!). After I had my children, we were talking one time about great books to read to them and he suggested the Lord of the Rings trilogy... which my husband was actually reading to my eldest at the time. Great minds thinking alike!*

*He was such a kind, gentle soul and I'll always remember him with a smile!*

*Sarah U'Ren, The Watershed Center Grand Traverse Bay*

Sarah U'Ren - April 15, 2019 at 02:03 PM

TB

“ I was a co-worker of Bob all the years he was employed at the Arnell Engstrom School. Bob was a well qualified and dedicated teacher. He offered his students a wide range of learning opportunities and provided them a simulating and secure environment. I'm confident many of his students have fond memories of Mr. Carstens, as we, his friends and co-workers do.  
Tom Bailey

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**Thomas A. Bailey** - December 25, 2018 at 08:53 PM

BG

“ When I was teaching life guarding classes, there was always a need for "victims" for the final exam. Bob was an excellent victim as he understood what needed to be done (he was a qualified life guard) and his size was a challenge for potential rescuers. I knew if the students could "rescue," Bob, that they would be capable life guards.

*Barb Graf*

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**Barbara Graf** - December 21, 2018 at 02:01 PM

EB

“ We met Bob in 2003, and he was so generous with his time. We were new birders then, and he took us out in the field countless times teaching us field marks, bird songs, and the habitats of different species. He walked our own property with us, teaching us about the birds that live in our own backyard. He got us involved in the Breeding Bird Survey, and kindled an enduring interest for us in the birds and the rich birding locations in our area. We are grateful to have known him.

*Elise & Joe Brooks*



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**Elise Brooks** - December 21, 2018 at 12:13 PM

MC

*Neat photo - thanks for sharing*

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**Megan Carstens** - December 28, 2018 at 08:33 PM

CH

“ I was Bob’s student teacher at Arnell E. In 1971. He taught me so much with his kindness and belief in the good in each child. I taught for 37 years. He was a good man an will be missed.

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**Cindy Hitesman** - December 10, 2018 at 10:58 PM

MC

“ 1 file added to the album memories



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**Megan Carstens** - December 10, 2018 at 08:44 PM

MC

*Dad bought us countless books growing up, a tradition he continued with his grandkids. Each month brought more packets of books in the mail - and my kids loved his selections - especially the Calvin and Hobbes and Steven Kellogg books. Our overflowing bookshelves, with books signed "Happy Birthday", or "Merry Christmas" "from Dad/Grandpa" are a wonderful way for my kids and myself to have him remain present in our lives - each time we pick up a book he chose we are grateful and happy that he took the time to foster reading as a lifelong pastime for myself and my children. Continuing the tradition he started with me, I have read *The Hobbit*, and *Lord of the Rings* to each of my children - starting with *The Hobbit* when they were five and the *Lord of the Rings* when they are a little older. My Dad had excellent taste in books and my favorite story is from about 20 or so years ago when I was back in town for the summer from college - I wandered into Horizon books - it was still at it's old location at that time. I got into a conversation with the man working there - who it turned out knew my father well, as he had apparently been working at Horizon Books for years. He said, "Your father always picked really good books - I would watch what he picked out for you and your sister, and then I would buy the same ones for my kids!" —Heather Foxman*

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**Megan Carstens** - December 10, 2018 at 09:44 PM

MC

“ Dear Megan and Heather,  
We have fond memories of cross country skiing with your parents, dinners out and playing cards together. I met your dad when we worked together at Arnell Engstrom and I remember what a dedicated teacher he was to his students. His love of birding and the beauty of the area was always evident. Do you remember the time that we had a 4th of July party at our house? A wind storm blew up and ended our celebration early. We had fun, anyway!! We are sorry for your loss but find comfort in your good memories of your dad.  
Sincerely,  
Mike and Kathy Cherry

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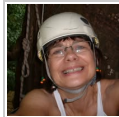
**Mike and Kathy Cherry** - December 10, 2018 at 11:21 AM

HF

Hi Mike and Kathy! I very much remember that windstorm! Those 4th of July parties are some great memories for me! Always a lazy afternoon at the lake followed by Mike and Dad taking turns lighting off fireworks leading up to "the big one" - usually a cone that would shriek and send sparks up about 20 feet! —Heather

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**Heather Foxman** - December 11, 2018 at 09:43 PM



Good to hear from you Mike and Kathy. I to remember all those fun times at the lake and those endless card games with the girls tucked in bed.

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**Becky Carstens** - December 12, 2018 at 10:06 PM

BK

“I was a friend and coworker with Bob at the Adult Work Center. He was a dedicated & hard working teacher. He took an interest in my children A.J. & Laura and was a "Godfather" to both of them. He was generous with his time & gifts with both. He attended many of A.J.'s cross country meets with me in all sorts of weather. He attended Laura's choir & orchestra concerts. We kept in touch through emails lately and I was so surprised to hear of his passing. I will miss his stories and humor. May he be at peace with the birds & nature he loved"

*Betsie Kortokrax*

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**Betsie Kortokrax** - December 09, 2018 at 04:12 PM



“Bob was very generous with his time. When we were building a much need shed, he not only helped as a volunteer carpenter, but instructed our sons as to what need to be done to do the job properly. Later on, when we were renovating our Antique Barn, he graciously came to our rescue. Another example was his sharing of holidays (family time) with some of his students who had nowhere to go. They were invited to his home for a true family meal and experience.

*Walt and Susan Feiger*

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**Susan Feiger** - December 09, 2018 at 12:15 PM

VT

“ As a fellow nature and bird lover, and member of Acme Township planning commission, I had the honor of working with Bob Carstens to protect our natural resources. As a fellow special education teacher, I also appreciated his work with students with special needs.

One of my favorite memories is doing a spring migratory bird count with Bob many years ago. We were up very early and he brought along his cassette tapes of bird calls. It was really like a road rally as we raced from one spot to the next, he knew exactly where to find each species - and we did - over 150 species that day in about 4 hours traversing Grand Traverse County. I had never seen a Greater Yellowlegs on the shore in Acme and I'm not sure I even knew they passed through here.

He shared his knowledge of birding graciously and enthusiastically and I so appreciate his efforts to ensure the habitats they required were identified and protected!

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**virginia tegel** - December 09, 2018 at 10:21 AM

MC

“ 1 file added to the album history



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**Megan Carstens** - December 07, 2018 at 09:14 PM

JW

*This is one of my treasured pictures of my brother and I, more than a few years ago. Bob was a wonderful, loving brother who loved teasing me and I enjoyed making him laugh.. Bob was always intense and serious about his endeavors, so it was fun when we shared a laugh. Bob loved that I called him the "Floating Checkerboard". He was into Chess for awhile, and frequently carried a chessboard around the house.*

*I already miss you very much Bob and hope you are enjoying your "natural surroundings" as part of the spiritual community. I know you miss the Traverse City environs, but I suspect you now have a great view of the beauty you loved.*

*I will always love you!!*

*Your sister, JudyAnn.*

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**JudyAnn Carstens- Webster** - December 08, 2018 at 06:36 PM

MC

“ 1 file added to the album memories



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**Megan Carstens** - December 07, 2018 at 09:04 PM

MC

“ *My Dad loved to create. When we were kids, he built us all kinds of toys - from cars and helicopters to go with the Fisher Price "Little People", to a kitchen set, to log horses we could ride on outside!*  
*-megan*

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**Megan Carstens** - December 07, 2018 at 11:43 AM