

OBITUARIES

Challenger disaster engineer dies

BY SARAH KAPLAN
THE WASHINGTON POST

For three decades Bob Ebeling, a former rocket engineer for NASA contractor Morton Thiokol, had been swamped by his own grief and guilt over the catastrophe he'd failed to stop

Ebeling is survived by his wife Darlene and 35 descendants spanning four generations.

The Illinois native had lived in Brigham City for more than half a century. He was a quiet, prayerful man — a husband, a devoted father, a great lover of the outdoors. He spent his free time birding, biking and boating in the vast wetland not too far from the Thiokol plant where he worked, he told the Salt Lake Tribune.

But he knew sorrow, too. In the years before the Challenger explosion, his son had committed suicide, Ebeling told the Los Angeles Times in 1987. At the time, Ebeling had cradled the young man in his arms and wondered why he hadn't done more to prevent his death.

It was a question he'd soon be asking himself again.

In 1985, booster rockets recovered from the Jan. 24 launch of the shuttle Discovery showed signs of seal problems. Ebeling, who had been working in engineering for 40 years, and two other engineers were assigned to examine the issue. Their findings were worrying — the rubber o-ring seals stiffened in cold weather, allowing the hot, high pressure gas inside the boosters to leak out — but NASA and their managers at Thiokol were slow to react.

That October, Ebeling wrote an urgent memo to McDonald, his boss, under the now-infamous subject line "Help!" He told McDonald that the rocket seal task force needed more resources, according to a presidential commission's 1986 report on the accident, and signed off with the words "This is a red flag."

But the launch date — already delayed once because of wind conditions — was approaching, with expected temperatures of about 30 degrees. The afternoon before the Challenger was due to take off, Ebeling called McDonald warning him that the cold could be disastrous for the launch. That set off six hours of teleconferences

between Thiokol engineers and executives and officials with NASA. Ebeling wasn't on that phone call, according to the Times — but McDonald, along with engineers Arnold Thompson and Roger Boisjoly, argued emphatically for a delay.

The space agency was determined to launch, though it's never been quite clear why. President Ronald Reagan was due to discuss the space program in his State of the Union address that night. NASA also prided itself on sending up shuttles routinely and reliably, and it had already pushed back the Challenger launch once.

Either way, officials fiercely resisted the suggestion of another delay. George Hardy, deputy director for science and engineering at the Marshall Space Flight Center, allegedly told the engineers he was "appalled" by their recommendation.

"My God, Thiokol," shuttle program manager Lawrence Mulloy was said to have asked, "When do you want me to launch, next April?"

Late that night, the executives and officials cast their final votes: Go.

Ebeling drove home uncharacteristically furious. "It's going to blow up," he told his wife, grimly.

The next day, Ebeling invited Boisjoly, his fellow engineer, into his office to watch the shuttle take off. When the clock reached T minus 5 seconds, Boisjoly would later tell the Guardian, the two men reached out to hold each other's hands.

Three. Two. One. At "lift off," the shuttle rocketed into the sky, clearing the launch pad without issue.

"I turned to Bob and said, 'We've dodged a bullet,'" Boisjoly recalled.

Ebeling, meanwhile, was in the midst of a prayer: "Thank you for making me wrong," he whispered. And then: "Kaboom. It went," Ebeling told CBS. "I—I walked right out of there and went in my office and cried."

All seven astronauts on board died: Cmdr. Francis Scobee, pilot Michael Smith,

mission specialist Ellison Onizuka, mission specialist Judith Resnik, mission specialist Ronald McNair, payload specialist Gregory Jarvis and "teacher in space" Christa McAuliffe.

Three weeks later, Ebeling and Boisjoly agreed to anonymous interviews with NPR in which they detailed their failed fight to stop the launch. It was the first report that NASA knew what could happen.

"I should have done more," Ebeling told reporter Howard Berkes at the time. "I could have done more."

He, Boisjoly, McDonald, Thompson and a fifth engineer, Brian Russell, would later give testimony before the presidential commission investigating the explosion. All of them said the same thing: NASA and Thiokol had been warned that it was unsafe to launch in the cold, but they went ahead anyway.

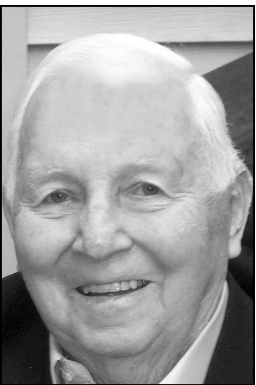
Eventually, Ebeling retired. He felt like he "wasn't needed anymore" at his job, he told the Times, and to be honest, he wanted nothing to do with the shuttle program any more. He couldn't take more people's lives into his hands.

"I couldn't stand another malfunction that I had anything to do with," he said.

Ebeling sought solace at the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, a vast oasis of wetlands and mudflats tucked between Utah's snow-capped mountains and arid deserts. In 1989, after years of Great Salt Lake flooding had all but destroyed the refuge — dikes and water control structures were overwhelmed, the headquarters lay in rubble, the landscape was washed bare — he showed up at the dilapidated Fish and Wildlife Service facility asking to volunteer.

Within a year, the retired engineer had rallied the community and raised funds for new infrastructure. On July 4, he helped give the first public tour of the revitalized facility, once again home to tundra swan and huge white pelicans and — Ebeling's favorite — several species of duck.

"Space is the new frontier. It's the future of things. Ducks are in the past tense," Ebeling told the Salt Lake Tribune in 1990. "They are what we had and where we came from. Both have their place in society."



ROBERT 'BOB' FRANK CRESSEY

GORHAM and SEBAGO - Robert Frank Cressey died on March 21, 2016, at his home in Gorham, at the age of 88. Robert was born on January 15, 1928, in Portland, to Florence (Usher) Cressey and Philo Burton Cressey Sr. of Gorham.

He graduated from Gorham High School in 1945, where he was on the State Championship Class C basketball team. Robert proudly served in the U.S. Navy until 1947; when he returned he married Mary Florence Smith of Standish. They were married for 60 years, Mary passing away in 2009. Robert built and ran an Esso service station in Sebago Lake Village. He later worked for Mobil Oil in Boston, Hallowell and Bangor, where he worked his way up from truck driver to terminal manager until his retirement. Robert was also a talented carpenter and mechanic who built not only his own homes but helped many family members and friends with their projects. Upon retirement, Robert and Mary remodeled their camp on Peabody Pond into a year-round home where they spent many happy years. Robert and Mary loved to socialize with family and friends. They danced, laughed, played cards and showed us all how to have a good time.

We want to give special thanks to Hospice of Southern Maine and the team of caregivers that made it possible for Robert to remain at home.

Robert is survived by his children, Scott E. Cressey and his wife, Shirley, of El Cerrito, California, Wade R. Cressey and his wife, Josephine, of Orono; Bobbi J. Cressey of Sebago; his sister, Carolyn Lindau and her husband, Joseph, of Coventry, Connecticut; his sister-in-law, Jane Gentry of Steep Falls; plus eight grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. In addition to his wife, Mary, Robert was predeceased by his brother, Philo Burton Cressey Jr.; and sister-in-law, Edna.

A memorial service for immediate family will be held next summer. For those that wish, donations may be made to: Hospice of Southern Maine, 180 US Route One, Scarborough, ME 04074. www.hospiceofsouthernmaine.org Dennett, Craig & Pate Funeral and Cremation, 13 Portland Rd., Buxton, are entrusted with the arrangements. For those wishing to post condolences, please go to www.DCPate.com.

ANGELA B. BROOKS

PRESQUE ISLE - Angela B. Brooks, 60, passed away early Monday morning March 21, 2016 at The Aroostook Medical Center in Presque Isle. Funeral services will be held 11AM Thursday March 24, 2016 at Duncan-Graves Funeral Home 30 Church Street Presque Isle. Friends may call 10AM Thursday until time of service at the funeral home. Online condolences may be shared at www.duncan-graves.com

Former Toronto mayor Ford dies after battle with cancer

REUTERS

TORONTO — Former Toronto mayor Rob Ford, whose tumultuous four years as leader of Canada's largest city included an admission of smoking crack, died on Tuesday, his office said, after struggling with cancer.

Ford, 46, who was serving as a Toronto city councillor, had been was undergoing treatment for an aggressive form of cancer that had reoc-



RALPH KERMIT CURTIS

BURLINGTON - Ralph Kermit Curtis passed away March 20, 2016, and was born in Burlington on June 17 1925. Ralph was predeceased by his wife, Florence (Richards) Curtis; and his daughters, Barbara (Dominic) Nuzzo and Clara (Stanley) Fisher.

Ralph was in WWII as a paratrooper with the Glider Corps and was part of 3 of the 5 jumps in Germany. When he returned home he worked in the logging mills before moving to Connecticut, where he worked at Atlantic Wire Co. He then retired back to his home town of Burlington.

During his retirement, Ralph enjoyed building and fixing things around "the Camp" adding additions and sheds. He kept his work shed very organized and ready for anything.

He leaves five grandchildren, Marie Puccino, Dominic Nuzzo of Branford, CT, and Nicholas Nuzzo of Florida, Joshua Fisher and partner, Tasha, of Ashland and Melissa Fisher of Presque Isle Me; six great-grandchildren, Miranda and Danielle Puccino of Branford, CT, Logan and Abigail Michaud of Presque Isle ME., and Luchenzo and Alessandro Nuzzo of FL. Ralph also leaves his brother, Charles Curtis; sisters, Joyce (Robert) Harvey and Viola Scales; and many nieces and nephews. He was predeceased by his parents, Ralph Curtis and Miranda (Archie) Shorey; and siblings, Geraldine Harriman, Viena Ward, Lawrence Shorey, Archie Shorey Jr., Glenwood Shorey and Clara Shorey.

Friends may call from 12 noon to 2 p.m. Saturday, March 26, 2016, at Clay Funeral Home, 7 Lee Road, Lincoln, where a funeral service will follow at 2 p.m. with the Rev. Keith Shorey officiating. Interment with full military honors will be at Mt. Repose Cemetery, later in the spring. Those who wish may donate in his memory to the Activities Fund at Colonial Heath Care, 36 Workman Terrace, Lincoln, ME 04457. Condolences may be expressed at www.clayfuneralhome.com.

STACEY B. LOWELL

ROCHESTER, N.H. - Stacey B. Lowell, 50, died at his home on Friday, March 18, 2016, after a period of failing health. Stacey was born in Glastow, Mont., on June 22, 1965, the son of Richard and Nancy (Larson) Lowell.

He had been living in Rochester, N.H., since 1991. He was a graduate of Portsmouth High School, a Veteran of the U.S. Army, a member of the American Legion and the DAV, and loved music.

Surviving members of the family include his parents, Richard and Nancy Lowell of Brownville; two brothers, Harold Lowell of Rochester, N.H., and Justin W. Lowell of Shapleigh; and two nieces.

Friends and family are invited to gather for funeral service to be held 11 a.m. Monday, March 28, 2016, at the H. J. Grondin & Son Funeral Home, 177 North Main St., Rochester, N.H., with burial the same day at 2 p.m. at the N.H. Veterans Cemetery in Boscawen, N.H. To sign the online guest book, please visit www.GrondinFuneralHome.com.

curred despite surgery and several rounds of chemotherapy.

Ford, married and a father of two small children, was diagnosed with a rare and hard-to-treat cancer in September 2014 after being hospitalized with abdominal pain.

He was in the middle of a campaign for re-election to mayor when the cancer was found but withdrew from the race and was elected as a city councillor instead.

BY HOWARD COHEN
MIAMI HERALD

MIAMI — And a little child shall lead them.

Michael and Camille Geraldi met in the gastroenteritis ward of Miami Children's Hospital in 1972. He was a pediatrician, and she was a nurse who was cradling a terminally ill infant in Room 238.

She dreamed of caring for sick and unwanted children ever since she was a child. He loved his patients like family.

"We both had such a tremendous fondness with the children. Being able to help them, that's what drew us together," Michael Geraldi said in a 1991 Miami Herald feature. The two married in 1975.

When the story was written, the Falls-area couple had two biological daughters, Renae and Jaclyn, and, since the first adoption in 1986, 17 adopted children who had Down syndrome, Zellwegger syndrome, cranio-facial deformations, developmental disabilities, autism, injuries and other critical disorders.

Upon Michael Geraldi's death from mesothelioma cancer on March 8, a day after his 73rd birthday, the couple had adopted, or became full legal guardians, of 88 children over the years. Thirty-one have survived. The youngest is 7.

In 1987, the couple founded the nonprofit The Up With Down Syndrome Foundation to meet the special needs of



MARICE COHN BAND | MIAMI HERALD | TNS

Dr. Michael Geraldi, at home with a few of his children, then numbering more than 40 in November 1996. At left was Jose, then 12, Adam, then 4, Meredith, then 3½. The Geraldis for years gave a home to children with acute physical problems.

children. Now renamed the Possible Dream Foundation, the organization offers job training for disabled adults, counseling and aid for parents of special needs children.

"I've never met a more caring individual. He never turned any patient away. He was one of those doctors who still made house calls," said Teresa Van Zee, Possible Dreams' administrative assistant.

Indeed, "he loved his practice as much as he loved his family," said his wife, Camille, who was honored as one of the nation's "points of light" by President George H.W. Bush. "He really was a caring person. He loved us both the same and I understood that. We met in the middle, and it's been a fantastic life. I couldn't have asked for it to be better."

The couple, who celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary last year, were scheduled to take a vacation in April, a cruise to Cancun with a stop in Haiti. The vacation would have been their first.

"He never wanted to leave his patients unattended and what I'm seeing the most, from the thousands of texts, is he is the one doctor that always returned a phone call and wouldn't go to bed until every single patient called back," his wife said Wednesday. "I've known that since the day I met him."

As their family grew, the Geraldis knew challenges beyond the expected baskets of laundry to be done daily — still six to eight loads per day. They weathered the loss of the three homes they used to care for their children,

then 22, in Hurricane Andrew in August 1992. Geraldi's pediatric practice was near the devastated Country Walk community in West Kendall, Florida. Four years later, they were driven to North Carolina when publicity led hostile cranks to vandalize their adjoining Kendall-area homes and to send anonymous threats. The North Carolina home burned down.

In more recent years, the couple maintained two homes and traveled back and forth to his in Miami-Dade and hers in Ellijay, Georgia. The ailing Geraldi spent his last moments with his wife at the Georgia home.

Geraldi worked at his Kendall-area practice up to a month before his death until his cancer treatments weakened him too much.

"He wanted to keep it going. Letting go of it all was very difficult for him," his wife said.

Born March 7, 1943, in Forest Hills, New York, Geraldi studied medicine at New York University and Columbia University and earned his medical degree at Meharry Medical College in Nashville.

Geraldi was a mentor for Barry University's and Florida International University's nurse practitioner programs. Above all, he was a family man.

"Michael allowed me to follow my dream," Camille Geraldi said. "Taking care of all those children is just a normal day."