



Raymond Charles Vars Jr.

August 5, 1937 - July 27, 2023

Raymond Charles Vars, Jr., 85, of Corvallis, Oregon, passed away peacefully on July 27, 2023. Charlie was born in Westerly, Rhode Island, to Mary Wilcox Vars and Raymond Charles Vars, a pharmacist who ran Vars Brothers Drug Store with his twin brother. Growing up, Charlie was a student leader and did well in school. He enjoyed two eye-opening trips to Europe: first to Austria for the 1951 Boy Scout World Jamboree and later to Paris with the YMCA in 1955. His family was well known in Westerly as the drugstore was an important fixture in the town. Charlie especially loved the soda fountain and the ice cream for which the store was famous. He learned responsibility early on with a paper route and by helping in the store. Also formative was the time spent in the summer at the beach community of Quonochontaug where he would swim, sail, and later spearfish.

Charlie earned a scholarship to Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, then finished his studies at the University of Denver (BS/BA 1958; MBA 1960) and finally the University of California at Berkeley (MA 1965; PhD in Economics 1969). At Berkeley, Charlie made life-long friends and acquired skills and values that he used throughout his teaching and political careers. Though some of his graduate work involved sorting data in damp and poorly lit warehouses in San Francisco for an evaluation of the city's freeway system, Charlie made the most of it by dining out once a month at one of the city's fine restaurants.

Charlie represented graduate students in the Free Speech Movement.

Charlie moved to Corvallis in 1966 to accept a faculty position at Oregon State

University (OSU). Soon, he met his wife Freda (Teitzel) Vars, who was also a professor at OSU. Freda and Charlie were married in Freda's hometown of Chehalis, Washington in December of 1968, amidst a record-breaking snowstorm. Charlie spent 30 years at OSU, where he loved teaching economics and doing policy research. He had many opportunities to apply his expertise: he was appointed nine times by five northwest governors to state, regional, and federal policy positions. Through these appointments and his research, Charlie contributed to the EPA, NOAA, NASA, the departments of the Army and the Interior, the US Coast Guard and numerous Oregon State departments and commissions. In 1985-86, he proposed, negotiated and organized the three-college OSU Graduate Faculty of Economics to formalize the collaboration between the fields of study most influenced by economics. Later, Charlie served as the director of that Graduate Faculty of Economics prior to his retirement from academia in 1996.

Charlie served on the Corvallis city council from 1983-1986, and as mayor from 1987-1995. While mayor he served at the state level on the League of Oregon Cities (LOC) Board. He culminated his service to LOC as its president and received its James Richards Memorial Award for promoting positive intergovernmental relations. He testified frequently to the Oregon legislature representing cities.

Among his accomplishments in Corvallis were negotiating a long-lasting budget framework, overseeing a transformative expansion of the library and its funding, and growing the city's greenspace. He often remarked that his best move in the library campaign was putting Freda in charge. He initiated the Willamette Riverfront Task Force that eventually resulted in the development of the Riverfront Commemorative Park that anchors the revitalized downtown area closest to the river. During his tenure, the city negotiated with the EPA the cleanup of the Corvallis Airport-Chrome site. In 1990, Charlie traveled to Uzhhorod Ukraine to establish it as our Sister City. A champion for diversity, Charlie played a key role in hiring Corvallis's first African-American city manager and in visits to Corvallis by civil rights icons

John Lewis and Ralph Abernathy. He loved his adopted state and especially the city of Corvallis. Charlie was most proud of his successes in enhancing its livability.

In his emeritus years, Charlie traveled frequently with Freda (over 50 countries in all!). A lover of fine cuisine, he took up cooking as a hobby, skied frequently during winter months, and continued to read avidly. Charlie served as a member and chair of the Corvallis Caring Place board of directors. He frequently participated in ALL (Academy for Lifelong Learning) both attending and presenting lectures on a wide range of topics. And even as his mind and memory diminished in later years, he continued to care deeply and seek solutions for the world's greatest challenges. Most of all he cherished his family. Charlie said repeatedly that "Freda was my most valuable asset in life; her love, strong support, good management, and wonderful sense of humor were and remain the foundation of what our sons and we accomplished."

Charlie was preceded in death by his parents, his beloved sister Ruth Barnes, and several cousins. He is survived by Freda, sons and daughters-in-law Raymond Vars and Masiel Rodriquez-Vars (New Jersey), Fredrick Vars and Caroline Harada (Alabama), and John Vars and Maggi Aaronson (California), and cousin Lois Vars (Westerly). Charlie also leaves 3 brothers-law, 3 nieces, 1 nephew, and eight wonderful grandchildren: Ben, Sebi, Mia and Jack Rodriquez-Vars, Adam and Charlotte Vars, and Naima and Bodhi Vars. An OSU Oral History interview of Charlie is available online.

A celebration of life will be held November 19, 2023, at the Corvallis Public Library.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to any of the following organizations: the Corvallis-Benton County Public Library Foundation; the Greenbelt Land Trust; and the Grace Center for Adult Day Services.

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

NOV **19**. 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM (PT)

Corvallis Public Library
645 NW Monroe Ave
Corvallis, OR 97330

Tribute Wall



“ 7 files added to the album Memories Album



Joan Cook - October 13, 2023 at 05:32 PM



“ 2 files added to the album Memories Album



DeMoss-Durdan Funeral Home and Crematory - August 14, 2023 at 03:13 PM



“ 15 files added to the album *Memories Album*



DeMoss-Durdan Funeral Home and Crematory - August 08, 2023 at 03:01 PM