



Otakar P. Prachar

April 4, 1912 - June 24, 2016

Otakar P. Prachar (“Prach”), a 52-year resident of Santa Barbara, died on June 24, at age 104.

Prach was born into a Czech immigrant family in Minneapolis on April 4, 1912, and grew up in Willow River Minnesota on a farm where Prach's father was a beekeeper. The northern Minnesota farm was plentiful with wild blueberries, which Prach’s younger sister, Mildred, who lived past 100 as well, credits for their longevity. In his early years, Prach showed a proclivity for woodworking and creativity, and at age 16, built a fine violin modeled on classical designs.

He graduated from the University of Minnesota with a bachelor’s degree in engineering and a master’s degree in physics. In 1941, he married Lydia Emma Erickson, also a graduate of the University of Minnesota. After a brief period with Allis-Chalmers in Milwaukee, he joined Allison division of General Motors in Indianapolis, Indiana in 1940. During World War II, he was involved in modifications to the Allison V-1751 engine used extensively in the P-51 Mustang and several fighter planes during that conflict. He held several patents on engine designs related to the V-1751, and worked on many post-war turbo-jet and other related aeronautical engine designs.

In 1960 Prach and Lydia moved to Santa Barbara when General Motors established a new think tank, Defense Research Laboratories (later Delco) in Goleta. At DRL he was involved in military engineering, automotive work (including original designs for collision air-bags), and NASA projects (including the design of the lunar rover). Though he never liked watching television, his family remembers him glued to the TV watching the first 1969 lunar landing. After retiring from General Motors in 1976 he was involved in a local Santa Barbara engineering firm, SeaTek, that designed stabilization devices for offshore oil-drilling platforms.

In his retirement years, Prach spent most of his time in computer programming, wood and metal machining, designing scientific experiments, and in reading science, history and

topics such as genetics and social evolution. He loved showing off his latest fractal, his newest mechanical contraption, or his current experiment to demonstrate some scientific law. He spent a month going down to Hendry's beach every evening to test his own program to calculate sunsets. He embraced technology, keeping an iPad by his side, and placed Amazon orders well into his 100s.

When his eyesight began to fail him during the last few years, he continued his love of learning by listening to virtually every science, technology, history, and philosophy audio book in the Public Library system. Prach remained "young" by following the antics of his three great-grandchildren that would always bring a proud smile and a chuckle.

Prach applied the scientific method and intellectual curiosity to his thinking on social, political, environmental and scientific topics. (Prach learned Russian as an adult so he could read Chekhov and Tolstoy novels as originally written.) He was tolerant of a wide range of viewpoints and examined them all carefully before forming his own opinions. His views on a wide range of issues were in constant flux, even to his 104th year. His family has been much influenced by his message that one's views can adapt and change by intellectual endeavor and contemplation of all facts instead of simply accepting popular beliefs.

Prach was preceded in death by his wife, Lydia, who died on February 23, 2016. He is survived by his sons Greg and Bill, and Bill's wife Merrill. He is also survived by granddaughter Alexandra Germain, grandson-in-law Paul and their three children, Tyler, Kaylee & Ethan who live in Newton, Massachusetts.

Comments



“ Please accept my family's heartfelt condolences on the loss of your dear loved one. May you find comfort in fond memories, and The Almighty God's promise in the Bible, to restore those asleep in death to perfect life on a paradise Earth

Greene Family - July 02, 2016 at 11:18 AM