



## Philip Peter Kirst

April 29, 1923 - June 27, 2015

(1923 - 2015)

Philip Peter Kirst, age 92, died at Serenity House hospice facility in Santa Barbara on Saturday, June 27, 2015 from congestive heart failure. A third generation Californian, Phil's long and full life began on April 29, 1923, when he was born in La Cañada, CA, the scion of prominent early California settlers.

Phil's parents were Burt John Kirst (1889-1955) and Gertrude Frances Lemieux Kirst (1891-1981), she of French Canadian extraction. His grandparents Nicholas Kirst (b. Wisconsin 1859-d. 1907 California) and his wife Pauline (née Paulina Kwasigroch, born 1866 in the German province of West Prussia; died 1948 in California) had emigrated from their home in Michigan to Southern California after their marriage in 1883. They eventually purchased several hundred acres of the old Rancho de La Cañada around 1901. Phil was born on Gould Avenue, not long after the road was cut in front of the family's Spanish Colonial-style home built in 1923. Phil's father Burt had commissioned the house from Paul Revere Williams (1894-1980), a graduate of USC and the first certified African-American architect west of the Mississippi. Most of Phil's children were also born when the family lived on Gould Avenue in a house he built farther up the street from his childhood home, which was demolished by the 210 Foothill Freeway.

As a youngster Phil attended La Cañada School, graduating in 1937, before continuing on to John Muir High School in Pasadena. He entered the University of Southern California in 1942, and enrolled in the Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps while completing his undergraduate studies. As a sophomore, Phil was elected to the Trojan Squires, an honorary men's organization. In his junior year Phil was elected to the Trojan Knights, founded in 1921 as "Official Hosts of the University." Phil was voted into the position of First Knight (president), and in that role oversaw the creation and execution of moving card stunts at USC football games, which in those pre-computer days were created by hand on hundreds of sheets of graph paper, distributed to students in the rooting section of Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. Also known as the "Guardians of Tradition," the USC

Trojan Knights are responsible for guarding the Victory Bell (the official rivalry trophy between USC and UCLA), as well as the Tommy Trojan statue and that of USC's unofficial mascot, the dog known as George Tirebiter. Also during his Junior year, Phil served on the USC Student Council, and was President of his fraternity, Kappa Sigma (Delta Eta Chapter). As an architecture major, Phil enjoyed lectures given by various teachers, including noted modernist architect Richard Neutra (1892-1970), but decided to focus on business administration when he decided drafting was a tedious chore.

Phil's university studies were interrupted when he received his NROTC commission in January, 1945. He shipped out to the Philippines via San Francisco, where with the rank of Ensign at age 22, Phil skippered the USS LCT-1239 (Landing Craft Tank of the Mk6 class) and her crew. Phil's arrival in the Philippines coincided with the month-long Battle of Manila, which saw the fiercest urban fighting of the Pacific Theater, with Allied victory ultimately liberating the capital city from 3 years of Japanese military occupation. Phil's 119-foot ship was part of the Service Force, Seventh Fleet, which won the Navy Unit Commendation for opening Manila harbor. Contemporary news accounts noted that "The unit operated under continuous enemy attack?and rendered invaluable service?in repairing, refloating and salvaging many vital service and combatant ships?Within a period of three months?this gallant unit completed the emergency clearing of Manila harbor, raising, removing or disposing of over 350 vessels together with large quantities of Japanese underwater ordnance to open the port fully to Allied use. All personnel attached to and serving with the unit [which included Phil and his crew]?are authorized to wear the Navy Unit Commendation Ribbon."

Although World War II officially ended in September, 1945, Phil remained in the Philippines until July, 1946. He received his Honorable Discharge from the U.S. Naval Reserve in 1962. Phil remained a brave and patriotic American all his life, committed to conservative causes and the advancement of freedom.

After serving in the Philippines, Phil returned to USC to complete his senior year. At his Kappa Sigma fraternity house, Phil remembered visits by Olympic runner and war hero Louis Zamperini (1917-2014), who recounted to his fellow Kappa Sigma fraternity brothers many of the experiences that were later documented in Laura Hillebrand's book "Unbroken" and the subsequent movie. During that time, Phil was elected to the Skull and Dagger Society, a USC honor society founded in 1913 for notable graduating seniors. The identities of Skull and Dagger members are kept a secret, and Phil remained a Skull and Dagger member in good standing right up to his death. Phil graduated from USC in 1947, with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Business Administration and a minor in Architecture.

Shortly after graduating from USC, Phil founded the Philip P. Kirst Company, Builders and Developers. Starting out as a residential homebuilder, Phil designed and built hundreds of houses throughout Southern California. Phil specialized in ranch style houses, and was greatly influenced by architect Cliff May (1908-1989), with whom he later became acquainted when they both were members of the men's riding groups El Viaje de Portolá in Orange County and Los Caballeros, which holds an annual ride on Catalina Island.

As his building career progressed, Phil became less interested in residential development and more interested in building shopping centers, commercial and industrial developments. Phil also designed and built the 1969 addition to the Spanish Colonial-style clubhouse at Flintridge Riding Club, originally built in 1923 by noted architect Reginald D. Johnson, A.I.A. (1882-1952). He received many awards for his designs and beautification projects. Although he built his last project in the late 1990s, Phil never completely retired, actively running his business of commercial property investments.

As he was starting his building business, Phil began dating Colleen Phipps, also a USC graduate who had been just as active on campus as he had. They married in November 1947 at Mission Santa Barbara, and celebrated their wedding with a luncheon afterward at the Miramar Hotel in Montecito. After honeymooning in San Francisco, the newlyweds settled into domestic life in La Cañada in a house that Phil built. Within 5 years they had produced four children: Peter James, Nancy Carol, Christine Anne and Anne Marie. Six years after Anne's birth they welcomed their "caboose," Lynn Patricia.

Having quickly outgrown their first house, the family had by then moved into the second house Phil built for them on Gould Avenue, the same street where he was born when the area was the Kirst Ranch. Their life revolved around family, friends and faith. Phil and Colleen were among the small group of worshipers at Holy Redeemer parish in Montrose, CA who were asked to found the new parish of St. Bede the Venerable Catholic Church in La Cañada. As their home was on a large parcel adjacent to trails, Phil built a barn and ring so the family could always keep horses at home. Horseback riding was a large part of the family's recreation, with post-Mass horseback rides a near-weekly Sunday tradition. The Kirst family was active as members of Flintridge Riding Club, where all the Kirst daughters showed hunters under the tutelage of legendary trainer Jimmy A. Williams (1917-1993).

In 1960, Phil and Colleen purchased property in Montecito, the same year they began enjoying annual summer vacations in a beach house on Padaro Lane in Carpinteria. They moved to Montecito full-time in 1975. Phil was an avid player at Knowlwood Tennis Club for many years. He was also among the earliest members of Birnam Wood Golf Club,

where he played golf until he was 90, winning the Legends Flight (80 and above) in a tournament at age 87.

A lifelong horseman and familiar sight on the local trails, Phil rode weekly until he was nearly 90. In addition to the above-mentioned men's riding groups, Phil was also a member of Rancheros Visitadores (Gringos Camp), Santa Barbara Trail Riders, Los Rancheros Pobres, and served as president of Montecito Trails Foundation for several years in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Phil and his wife Colleen continued their involvement with USC throughout their lives, starting in 1950 when they began serving on the Reunion of the Forties Committee, which held long weekend reunions for the classes of the 1940s every five years. They later served many years on the board of the Half Century Trojans. A longtime member of the USC Presidential Associates, in 2000 Phil was made a recipient of the Widney Alumni House Award. In 2007, both Phil and Colleen were presented with the USC Distinguished Service Award. They are benefactors of the USC Norris Cancer Center, and established the Philip P. Kirst and Colleen Kirst Endowed Scholarship, which grants scholarships to USC undergraduate students who fall into the "middle class" category, thereby disqualifying them for low-income aid. For many years Phil enjoyed his 50-yard-line seats in L.A. Memorial Coliseum, rooting for his beloved Trojan football team.

Known for his handsome good looks and love of travel, Phil will be missed by his loving wife of nearly 68 years, Colleen Kirst. He is also survived by their children Peter J. Kirst (Jodi) of Lovell, WY, Christine Gerhardt (Ron) of La Verne, CA, Anne Sedgwick (Jonathan) of Coeur d'Alene, ID, and Lynn P. Kirst of Montecito, CA, his sister Elizabeth (Betty) Kirst Miller of Palm Desert, CA, as well as 6 grandchildren, 8 great-grandchildren, numerous nieces, nephews and admiring friends. Phil was predeceased by his daughter Nancy Carol Kirst (1950-2011), son-in-law (Lynn's husband) Lynn Robert Matteson, Ph.D. (1939-2015), his parents, and his brothers Bert L. "Buddy" Kirst (1917-1923), Robert N. "Bob" Kirst (1921-1989) and Clifford E. "Cliff" Kirst (1924-2011).

Phil's funeral Mass will be held at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, 1300 East Valley Road, Montecito on Saturday, July 11, 2015 at 11:00 a.m. The celebrant will be The Most Reverend Peter Forsyth Christensen, Bishop of the Diocese of Boise, Idaho, godson of Phil and Colleen Kirst. Private interment will be held on a later date at Santa Barbara Cemetery.

# Events

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**JUL** **Visitation** 09:00AM - 04:00PM

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Welch-Ryce-Haider - Downtown

15 E. Sola St., Santa Barbara, CA, US, 93101

**JUL** **Funeral Mass** 11:00AM

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Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic Church

1300 East Valley Rd., Santa Barbara, CA, US, 93108