



Charles Leland Ralph

August 16, 1929 - September 15, 2025

FORT COLLINS – Charles Leland Ralph died at home on September 15, 2025, at age 96. Born in Flint, Michigan, on August 16, 1929, he was the son of John Leland Ralph and Ruby Martha Poinsett. He grew up in southeast Missouri and graduated with honors from Southeast Missouri State College in 1952 with a BS in Zoology. He earned his Ph.D. in Biological Sciences at Northwestern University in 1955, after which he was drafted into the Army where he worked for two years at the U.S. Army Chemical Corps in Edgewood, MD. Following his discharge from the Army (Specialist Third Class), he landed a job at the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Research Center in Beltsville, MD as a Physiologist in the Poultry Division. His first academic appointment was in the Biology Dept. at the University of Pittsburgh starting in 1959. He was made full Professor in 1967 and was department chair from 1973-74. He moved to Fort Collins, CO to become Chair of the Zoology and Entomology Dept. at Colorado State University in 1974, a position he held until 1984. He retired in 1996. His research focused primarily on endocrinology and diurnal rhythms. He authored or co-authored ca. 150 scientific publications, authored a textbook on Physiology, organized and contributed to professional meetings in several countries, and mentored many undergraduate and graduate students and postdoctoral fellows.

Charles had two marriages, the first to Elizabeth Anne Roth in 1952 in St. Louis, MO. Charles and Elizabeth were married for 26 years. They had three

children (two surviving), and the family had many adventures hiking, camping, and cross-country skiing close to home in Pittsburgh PA and across the USA. Charles was active with the Audubon Society of Western Pennsylvania and the Todd Nature Reserve in Butler CO, PA. Charles' second marriage was to (Frances) Reta Wick Herbertson in 1980 in Fort Collins, CO. Reta predeceased Charles in 2022. Charles and Reta enjoyed a culturally rich life, including world travel and attending concerts, operas, and square dances together. They were great supporters of the arts and helped establish the Ralph Opera Program at Colorado State University. During his post-retirement years, Charles published a newsletter and maintained two websites for the opera community of Colorado. Charles also volunteered many hours of invasive weed control and maintenance work at City of Fort Collins natural areas and The Nature Conservancy's Phantom Canyon Preserve. As lovers of the arts and nature, Charles and Reta have left a legacy to The Nature Conservancy of Colorado, the Charles and Reta Ralph Vocal Music Scholarship Endowment at Colorado State University, and the Reta Wick Ralph Fund in Art Preservation and Art Education at the University of Wyoming.

Charles is survived by his children, Alisa Ralph (Patrick Cagney) of Burien, WA and Paula Ralph (Julian Maynard) of Boalsburg PA, and his grandchildren, Brian Maynard and Karen Maynard (Richard Rado). His daughters have fond memories of family road trips exploring the USA, fun "wine time" conversations on the back patio, and their father's joy in telling corny jokes. They appreciate the sense of curiosity and love of life-long learning he instilled. The family is grateful for the support of dear friends and exceptional caregivers who kept Charles' spirits up during his last years. Charles often expressed his gratitude for the good fortune, supportive mentors, and interesting people and places he enjoyed over his long life.

Tribute Wall

RP

“ Charles welcomed me into the remarkable menagerie that was his Lab at Pitt. We had tadpoles, quail, chickens, rats, and numerous other species. He guided us with a kind and gentle hand, who could be challenging us to find the best solutions. That often meant working with colleagues outside of our lab and department, enriching our experience. Vernon Gay, Ivy McManus, Ernst Knobil and Ian Campbell to name a few. Hats off to you Charles and the wonderful Reta. May your arias fly high. Russ Pelham, PhD, 973

russ Pelham - March 18 at 05:19 PM

WK

“ Charles was known as “Mr. Opera” in Fort Collins. My opportunity to conduct a large part of the Italian opera repertoire was a result of his and Reta’s generous support of both opera at CSU and Opera Fort Collins. I’ll always be thankful for their role in bringing these great stage works to our community!

Wes Kenney - January 20 at 08:28 PM

BL

“ Charles will be sorely missed; he and Reta were warm and gracious in welcoming me to the Opera Fort Collins family. Their support of the arts in general, and opera in particular, was inspiring. So glad to have known them!

Brian Luedloff - January 20 at 02:06 PM

VM

“ *To the Family: We were very sad to learn about Charles' passing. We enjoyed his (and Reta's) friendship since moving to FoCo in 1985. Don joined the CSU Biology department faculty and served as a colleague. When Vicki became the executive director of Opera Fort Collins in 2009, the Ralph's were fully engaged with the company lending wisdom and support. Their warmth, humor, and mentoring made working with them a delight. The impact this grand pair had on the academics and arts in northern Colorado and Wyoming cannot be matched. Thank you, Charles and Reta. Vicki Fogel Mykles and Donald L. Mykles, PhD.*

Vicki Fogel Mykles - January 20 at 10:02 AM