

A Tribute to Robert Martin Sorensen
September 26, 1919 to April 2, 2020
Dania's Past Grand President
And Bornholm's Centenarian
By John Scheuber, with input from Marci Sorensen Dillon

Bob was born on September 26, 1919 to Danish parents, Harry Morton Sorensen and Loretta Johanna Andersen in Chicago, IL. He passed away on April 2, 2020 roughly 6 months after his 100th birthday. His family moved to Modesto when Bob was 9 months of age when his parents bought 40 acres of farmland at what is now the corner of McHenry and Standiford Avenues for \$200.00 per acre.

His mother, Laura, was a nurse at Cook County Hospital in Chicago and continued her nursing career in California. Bob became the man of the house at age 5 when his father drowned while attempting to save 2 teenage girls in the Tuolumne River. He talked often of needing to help put food on the table so he would go bird hunting to provide for the family. He graduated from Modesto High School in 1937 where he excelled in track and football.

He remembers when the first "talkie" movie came to Modesto. He got tickets and was excused from school by his teacher to attend the big event. He started working for Modesto Auto Parts in 1937 as a delivery boy. His \$15 a week allowed for a \$5 payment on his 1-year-old Harley Davidson Motorcycle (\$400) and a \$5 payment on his '37 Ford convertible (\$550). He had \$5 left to spend.

Bob enlisted in the Army in 1942 for WWII. He was commissioned to the rank of second lieutenant before being honorably

discharged in 1945. Upon entering the Army, he first traveled to New Zealand, and Melbourne and Perth, Australia before traveling by ship to Bombay, India, where they stayed temporarily in a British camp. A large round disc was bonged every day at 4pm when it was teatime, and everyone chanted “tekala”. This made everyone happy. He likes to say he traveled around the world on his way home. He left Abadan, Iran and made stops in Cairo, Egypt; Tripoli, Libya; Casablanca, Morocco; Dakar, Senegal; Natal and Belem, Brazil; Georgetown, British Columbia; Puerto Rico, and Havana, Cuba before arriving on U.S soil in Miami.

He met Alice Ann Doerksen (1945) in Modesto and they married in 1947. He was based at Camp Roberts and came home every weekend to see her. When Bob and Alice were married, they agreed his check from Modesto Auto Parts would be saved and Alice would work to support them. Bob joked about this, that he was a “kept man” for that time.

Being very constructive, he built an inboard racing boat named “Once Over” (but it went over more than once... 6 times actually). He started building cracker box boats and built the first successful fiberglass bottom boat in the Modesto area.

He and Alice bought a 6-acre farm on Paradise Road in 1955, followed by 20 acres of peaches and 20 more of walnuts as the farm expansion began. He served as a Board Member for Paradise School from 1962-1971.

Alice started their egg production business by raising 50 chicks on the back porch until the hens were big enough to be moved to brooder houses. These birds were raised for meat and eggs. Later this small endeavor expanded to three 200-foot chicken houses with 25,000 laying chickens.

Bob became a NASCAR official (chief steward and timer) for Merced and Stockton Speedways and occasional racing events at County Fairs with Alice scorekeeping. They averaged 2-3 NASCAR events per week tying up all weekends during the spring and summer months. They worked in NASCAR from 1961-1977.

Bob continued to acquire additional farm acreage and planted walnut trees. At the time of his passing he was still planting trees but was transitioning to almonds. He also served as a Board member for Diamond Walnut Growers from 1990-1996.

Over recent years bought, fixed up, and sold houses (22 houses in all) for many years. He still owned 11 rental properties throughout Modesto, at the time of his passing.

He got very active in the Danish organization and served in various leadership positions at Bornholm #14 in Modesto. He served over 30 years as the local Secretary and later went on to become the Grand Lodge President for California and Nevada and was installed into that position in Ferndale in 1998. Martha Nielsen, who was the Dannebrog Grand President, speaks often of the pride they had in knowing their parts well and received compliments for their Installation Rituals. They were a polished team.

Being mechanically talented, Bob built and maintained a custom walnut huller and dehydrator for commercial use on his farm and provided those services to his neighboring farmers. He often served as a resource for fellow farmers and ranchers, about walnuts in particular. He completed Walnut Production classes at Harvard and UC Davis. He also completed a Class sponsored by

Diamond Walnut at UC Berkley. They continue to send literature to Bob addressed to “Dr. Sorensen”, which gave him a chuckle.

He recently received his second Top Quality Award from Diamond Growers in 2018 for his Howard walnuts.

Bob was preceded in death by his wife Alice A. Sorensen and their son, David M. Sorensen. Surviving him are his two daughters, Barbara Sorensen Beck (Linda Gail Jenkins) and Marci Sorensen Dillon; four grandchildren: Jennifer (Justin), Jason (Fran), Katrina (Brandon), and Kevin (Bethany), and four great grandchildren: Jaritt, Riley, Jordan, Garitt.

Bob will be dearly missed by all of us who knew him well. He will always be respected for his leadership and for being multifaceted. He came from a meager childhood and became very successful farmer and landlord because of his work ethic and tenacity. While he provides a whole new definition to the word “Frugality” he often helped others and shared with them his knowledge and leadership.