'Pink' Rohrback, A Gentleman Lawyer And Devoted Family Man

By Carolie Beers

Forget the lawyer jokes. You certainly couldn't tell them about "Pinkie" Rohrback.

But he might have known one to tell you.

And if he beat you in court, chances are you'd come back for more, in a later case.

But with Pinky as your counsel.

Short and dignified, with a cherubic, rosy-cheeked face, this respected Seattle attorney - whose family and friends describe him as happy and interested in seeing others happy even if he denied his own needs - liked to poke fun at himself.

"He used to talk, sometimes, of his war exploits," said William Smart, an associate in the Keller Rohrback law firm to which Mr. Rohrback had belonged since 1950.

"Not that he was a hotshot submariner during World War II in the South Pacific. More like how scared he'd been. He had a self-deprecating way that belied his intellect."

Pinecone Merritt Rohrback died Tuesday, Feb. 1, of cancer. He was 71.

Born in Seattle, he graduated from Ballard High School and was an Eagle Scout and mountaineer, having scaled the Northwest's major peaks.

He served as lieutenant, junior grade, on the submarine Flenny, returning to graduate magna cum laude from the University of Washington Law School.

After joining his law firm, he became known for his involvement in notable trials, particularly in product liability. Recent cases involved Puget Sound Blood Center in the era of AIDS and transfusion lawsuits.

"He brought to his work enthusiasm and a real knowledge of the center and its operations," said the center's executive director, Dr. Richard Counts. "He saw it as more of a community service than just providing legal advice."

Many remember Mr. Rohrback's gentlemanly manner in court.

"He was adamant that the humanity of the litigants be preserved," Smart said. "Even in bitter litigation, he would make friends with the other side and would get calls later to try other cases for them."

Mr. Rohrback was president of Seattle-King County Bar Association (1968-69), and a member of the American Board of Trial Advocates and the American College of Trial Lawyers. He also lectured at the UW.

Family was equally important. He married in 1950, having met his wife, Edith, when he ushered her to a pew at Woodland Park Presbyterian Church: "After one service he asked if he could usher me home," she said.

He would take his family camping and on hikes, bought horses for the girls to show - and would get up at 6:30 a.m. Sundays to get them to the show on time, although Sunday was his only free day. Or take them to the office Saturdays to color, while he worked, to give his wife a break.

Mr. Rohrback took Edith to Europe "at least eight times, the last one in April." He took the youngsters dude-ranching or boating in the summer and skiing in the winter.

"He'd buy us all chair-lift tickets," said daughter Lynn Bailey, "then he'd start to sidestep up the mountain, saying 'I can get there just as fast as you can.' And he would."

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Other survivors include his daughter Patricia Anstett, Cardiff, Calif.; his sons James Rohrback and John Rohrback, Seattle; his sisters Frances Shearin, Marysville, Calif., Mary Milton, Olympia, and Margaret Fralick, Colts Neck, N.J.; his brothers Gilson Rohrback, Mill Creek, and Stibbins Rohrback, Bothell; and eight grandchildren.

Memorial services will be at 1:30 p.m. Friday at Calvin Presbyterian Church, 18626 Third Ave. N.W.

Remembrances may be made to the church; University of Washington School of Law Alumni Fund, UW campus, Seattle, WA 98195; or Swedish Hospital Tumor Institute, 1221 Madison St., Seattle, WA 98104.

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