



Dr. Robert S Rhodes

March 3, 1936 - April 30, 2026

In Loving Memory of Dr. Robert S. Rhodes

We celebrate the life of Dr. Robert Shaw Rhodes, who passed away on April 30, 2026, at the age of ninety. He was a beloved husband, father, grandfather, uncle and friend, whose life was marked by generosity, an endless capacity for love, a commitment to education, great humor, service, and a gift for storytelling. His presence brought comfort, laughter, and love to those around him, and his memory will continue to live on in the many lives he touched.

Robert was born on March 3, 1936, in Orangeburg, South Carolina, to John D. and Emma Rhodes. From an early age, he was known for his intelligence, quick wit, and a talent for mischief balanced by kindness and care. He grew up on the campus of South Carolina State University surrounded by his six siblings –brothers John and Miller, and sisters Ruth, Vicki, Rose, and Beverly – where he learned the importance of responsibility and care for those around you. As a “campus brat,” it was not surprising that he attended South Carolina State University (SCSU), graduating in 1958. While there he became a member of Omega Psi Phi fraternity (1955). From SCSU, he followed the example of his oldest brother John and attended Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee, where he graduated in 1962. He later earned a diploma in Aviation Medicine from the U.S. Army School of Aviation Medicine in 1967. Major Rhodes was a U.S. Army flight surgeon & pathologist from 1967 to 1970.

From 1964 to 1978, Nashville, TN was home (other than a short stint in DC).

Robert taught at Meharry Medical College and among several assignments directed their Sickle Cell and Hematology Programs. He also taught at Vanderbilt University School of Medical from 1970 to 1972.

Never being one to shy away from a new challenge, in 1978, Robert moved his family from Nashville to Ypsilanti MI., where he joined General Motors as an Occupational Physician. It was during this time that he received his master's in public health from the University of Michigan, School of Public Health in 1984. Robert held several executive roles across the company until his retirement in 2001.

In 1987, Robert became a proud member of Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity, Inc (Boule'). During this time, he developed a love for the University of Michigan football program. He also became an avid golfer. There was never a vacation or event that would occur without a golf game.

Throughout his life, Robert dedicated himself to education, excellence, and service, shaping countless lives through his leadership in private practice, academic research, teaching, and mentoring, which left a lasting impact on the fields he served.

His leadership was not only evident in General Motors but in the many professional organizations he held membership in, e.g., President of Michigan Occupational Environmental Medicine, and his many roles in the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, of which his pioneering achievement as its first African American president from 1997 to 1998 marked a significant milestone in his career and the organization's history.

Of course, anyone who knew Robert (by now he was fondly called "Doc") knew that retirement did not mean stopping, and he continued his professional engagement as a consultant for many years. In 2014, the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine recognized him with its "Knudsen Lifetime Achievement Award".

Doc found joy in his wide circle of friends, global travel, a good party, great cognac, golf and history, and he was especially proud of his family legacy that

traced back to Robert Smalls. Whether he was perfecting his lamb chops, biscuits, or smoked turkey, providing thoughtful guidance to one of his children or grandchildren, or gathering at home with friends, he always brought a natural enthusiasm, curiosity and a terrific sense of humor. He was genuinely interested in others and took care to let you know that. He lived a remarkable life and yet never made others feel unremarkable.

Above all, Robert cherished his family. In 1964, he married his first wife, Annette Foster, who preceded him in death in 1987. They had two children, his daughter Robin Rhodes Rone (Christopher) and his son Robert (Erica). In 1994, he found love again and married Gwendolyn Malone, embracing her daughters, Nekole and Candice Smith, as his own. He later became the proud Grandpa of four: Robert Rone (Chunghwa Suh), Andrew Rhodes, Sophia Rhodes, and Amaya Smith, each of whom was blessed by his love, support, friendship, and guidance.

Robert was preceded in death by his parents John D. and Emma Rhodes; his siblings John D. Rhodes, Jr., MD; Victoria McGraw; Ruth Delaney; Rose Dannelly; Beverly Hawkins; and Miller F. Rhodes, MD; and his son-in-law Christopher Rone. In addition to his wife, children, and grandchildren, Robert is also survived by his nieces Jackye McGraw-Lawson, Kimberly Rhodes, Yvonne Wells, Michelle Brooks, and nephews, Charlie "Chuck" Dannelly II, Anthony Rhodes, Miller Rhodes Jr. and Erskine Hawkins Jr.

Though Robert "Doc" will be deeply missed, we remember him with gratitude and joy for his remarkable life, his unwavering love, and the legacy of excellence, service, and humanity he leaves behind. His spirit lives on in the stories he told, the lives he shaped, and the family he cherished. In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made in his memory to the Meharry Medical College, Class of 1962.

Upcoming Events

Memorial Service

JUN 4. 9:30 AM (ET)

Kemp Funeral Home & Cremation Services

24585 Evergreen Rd

Southfield, MI 48075

(248) 702-5367

info@kempfh.com

<https://www.kempfuneralhome.com>

Tribute Wall

MW

“ My condolences to Gwen in the loss of her husband. Robert and I were classmates at Meharry Medical College Class of 1962. He was one welcoming me joining the class in transfer 1960 when others were not receptive. I hold memories of him and pray for Gwen and family. Margaret Claytor Woodbury

Margaret Woodbury - May 09 at 12:48 PM

CB

“ Charles and Jackie Butts purchased the Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum for the family of Dr. Robert S Rhodes.



Charles and Jackie Butts - May 07 at 05:36 PM

CB

“ Charles and Jackie Butts planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Dr. Robert S Rhodes.

Charles and Jackie Butts - May 07 at 05:36 PM

BF

“ I remember sitting and talking with Robert at various GM conferences and other events - was such a pleasure to listen to his many experiences and enjoy the counsel of a wiser man. Rest in Peace, Dr. Rhodes.

Bob Fox

Bob Fox - May 06 at 12:08 PM



“ *Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Dr. Robert S Rhodes.*



May 06 at 12:02 PM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Dr. Robert S Rhodes.

May 06 at 12:02 PM