



Johnston, Robert Elliott (Bob)

Robert Elliott (Bob) Johnston, age 72, of Enfield, NY died Saturday, December 20, 2014 at Cayuga Medical Center after extended treatments for lymphoma. He was born in Philadelphia, April 16, 1942, the oldest child of Robert Henry and Margaret Elliott (Riley) Johnston. In 1970, after getting a PhD from Rockefeller University, he became a professor at Cornell University, moved to Ithaca, and married Joan Evelyn (Colsey). In the Psychology Department, Bob did experimental research on rodent communication and individual recognition through odors, which was well published and influenced further research around the world. He was a mentor to many post-docs, graduate students, and

undergraduates, many of whom kept in touch. Connections with German and Turkish researchers led to studying wild hamsters in Turkey and discovering that the native hamsters are not active at night, a surprise to pet hamster owners everywhere. He traveled extensively, both to attend professional meetings in different countries and to observe animals in their natural habitats in Dagestan, Africa, South America, China, and Australia. A note was found in his office that said, "Retirement plans: find a new species and study it in the field." Bob was athletic, artistic, amusing, and tall. He played basketball for Havertown High School and Dartmouth College, and enjoyed squash, cross-country skiing, ice skating, and hiking. He loved dancing with his wife and supplemented his high school swing dance skills with Texas dances learned while on sabbatical in Austin. A talented artist, Bob started with playful dot drawings, then moved to oil painting, using his extensive photographs of nature as the subject matter of his work. Inspired by the natural shapes of wood found in the forest on his property, he also carved impressionistic sculptures and bowls. Besides his loving wife of 44 years, he is survived by his sons Alexander and Aidan, who will remember him as a kind and loving man who provided for them without judgment. He is also survived by his brother, Walter (Joanna) Johnston; his sister, Susan Johnston; his uncle, John Elliott (Helen) Riley; and his cousins, nieces, nephews, and their children. Important to him, as well, were his many friends, colleagues, and former students. Bob was buried at Greensprings Natural Cemetery Preserve in Newfield. A memorial service will be announced at a later date.