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Robert Erlandson obituary (September 4, 1937–February 4, 2024): a true giant and great champion of ultrastructural pathology

Ultrastructural pathology lost a great champion with the recent passing of Robert Erlandson, PhD, who died on February 4, 2024, after a prolonged illness.

Robert Alf Erlandson was born in New York Hospital on September 4, 1937 to Alf Erlandson and Nancy Martino Erlandson. Bob was the eldest of three children. His father died in a tragic train accident at the age of 59, while Bob was still in school at the time. Bob's mother had previously been a homemaker; but after her husband's demise, she began a career as secretary, culminating in her work as an executive assistant at Paramount Pictures, New York.

For his undergraduate degree, Bob attended New York University, leading to a Master's degree in Virology and medical school at Cornell University. After completing his basic science training in medical school, Bob realized that patient contact was not his cup of tea. At the advice of his counselor, Bob instead embarked on a PhD program in Pathology at Cornell, and he received his PhD degree in 1969.

During the completion of his PhD training, Bob started a career in pathology at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center (MSKCC). There at a hospital party, he met the love of his life, a young French-Canadian nurse named Elaine Latulipe, whom he married in 1973. Later, he often fondly called Elaine "Tulip," a reference to her French-Canadian name. They lived together in a high-rise apartment on the Upper East side, not far from MSKCC, and Bob worked there and the Rockefeller University, with occasional projects at the National Institutes of Health.

While at Rockefeller University, Bob worked with Nobelist George Palade, and Palade's seminal discoveries and experience with ribosomes, mitochondrial cristae, neural synapses, junctional complexes, and Weibel-Palade bodies must have had a profound personal influence (J. Cell. Mol. Med.

Vol 11, No 1, 2007 pp. 2–3: Tribute to Professor George E. Palade).

While Bob was a graduate student, faculty pathologist Fred Shipkey mentored him and encouraged his work with the electron microscope (EM). EM had become a standard method for ancillary diagnosis of tumors, and Dr. Shipkey's 1964 description of the membrane-bound parallel arrays of fibers of alveolar soft part sarcoma became one of the defining features of this neoplasm (Shipkey FH, Lieberman PH, Foote FW, Stewart FW. *Cancer*, 1964–07, Vol.17:7 821–830). During that same year, Shipkey assisted Bob with description of a novel replacement of Maraglas epoxy, which penetrated tissue quite slowly and made it brittle (Erlandson, Robert A. *The Journal of cell biology*, 1964–09, Vol.22:3 704–9). During those early years, Dr. Shipkey and Bob also published descriptions of various viruses (Shipkey FH, Erlandson RA, Bailey RB, Babcock VI, Southam CM. *Experimental and molecular pathology*, 1967–02, Vol.6 (1), p.39–67; SOUTHAM CM, SHIPKEY FH, BABCOCK VI, BAILEY R, ERLANDSON RA. *Journal of Bacteriology*, 1964–07, Vol.88 (1), p.187–199).

Bob's work in his field of tumor ultrastructure began in earnest in 1968 with his description of the ultrastructural features of chordoma (Erlandson, R A; Tandler, B; Lieberman, P H; Higinbotham, N L. *Cancer research* (Chicago, Ill.), 1968–10, Vol.28 (10), p.2115–2125). In the following years, Bob described the ultrastructural features of over 100 neoplasms. Counted among these publications were key descriptions of peripheral nerve neoplasms (Erlandson, Robert A.; Woodruff, James M. *Cancer*, 1982–01, Vol.49 (2), p.273–287; Erlandson, RA. *Ultrastructural pathology*, 1985, Vol.9 (1–2), p.113–122), rhabdomyosarcoma (Erlandson, RA. *Ultrastructural pathology*, 1987–01, Vol.11 (2–3), p.83–101), melanomas (Erlandson RA. *Ultrastructural pathology*, 1987,

Vol.11 (2-3), p.191-208), and peripheral neuroectodermal tumors (Erlandson, RA. Ultrastructural pathology, 1983–12, Vol.5 (4), p.323-328).

Bob's experience with neoplastic ultrastructure led to the publication of *Diagnostic Transmission Electron Microscopy of Human Tumors: The interpretation of submicroscopic structures in human neoplastic cells*, followed by his later *magnum opus*, *Diagnostic Transmission Electron Microscopy of Tumors*.

Bob's first book *Diagnostic Transmission Electron Microscopy of Human Tumors: The interpretation of submicroscopic structures in human neoplastic cells* [https://www.amazon.com/Diagnostic-Transmission-Microscopy-monographs-diagnostic/dp/0893521388?ref_ast_author_dp] is a very readable short volume published by Masson in 1981 as part of their *Monographs in Human Pathology*. This is the one that I loaned to residents and faculty who needed to learn the basics in reviewing the photographic images prepared for tumor diagnosis. In it, Bob outlined the features of subcellular components whose recognition became critical in examining ultrastructural features, and then he gave examples of neoplasms that contain these organelles.

Bob's next text *Diagnostic Transmission Electron Microscopy of Tumors*, published in 1994 by Raven Press [<https://www.amazon.com/Diagnostic-Transmission-Electron-Microscopy-Tumors/dp/0781700426>], takes a more encyclopedic approach and was the definitive reference for anyone wishing to research the ultrastructural features of a particular neoplasm. This book contains nearly 1000 electron micrographs, and the index supplies cross-references to look up any particular subcellular structure or any neoplasm.

Bob was one of the founding members of the Society of Ultrastructural Pathology (SUP) [<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01913123.2016.1269400>]. He stayed involved with the SUP throughout his subsequent career, serving the society as Councilor, President-Elect, President, and Immediate Past President. He presented numerous platform presentations at many meetings and extensively lectured on EM topics on both national and international levels. As SUP Councilor of the Americas, he served as an EM ambassador. In 2006,

he became the second recipient of the SUP Lifetime Achievement Award [<https://www.ultrapath.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/SUP-Electronic-Newsletter-Post-Ultrapath-XIII-2006-Society-for-Ultrastructural-Pathology.pdf>].

I met Bob and Elaine soon after beginning my pathology fellowship at MSKCC in July 1980. We discussed our shared mentorship by Dr. Fred Shipkey, who worked at the University of Tennessee Health Sciences Center during my residency. We soon discovered that we also shared a love for rockabilly music, leading to many excursions to seek out musical venues in New York. My wife Jean and I continued our friendship with Bob and Elaine during the ensuing years.

Bob retired from MSKCC on April 1, 2000, at the age of 62, giving him time to pursue his many hobbies. His collection of soldiers began as a child, when his mother gave him some at his birthday. These were hand-painted military miniatures from France produced by Mignot. By the time of his retirement, he had acquired an impressive collection that included famous battle scenes from many eras and locations. His other hobbies included listening to bluegrass and classic country music and watching movies, and he amassed a huge collection of DVDs and CDs. During my last visit to Bob's house, he showed me his system of grading each movie with stars in a personal notebook. Rodney Dangerfield's *Meet Wally Sparks* received five stars, evidencing Bob's lovable sense of humor. Bob was also an avid skier and greatly enjoyed rollerblading and bicycling. As his health declined, Bob's joy became regular consumption of McDonald's cheeseburgers, French fries, and apple pies.

Bob will be missed by many. His protean contributions to ultrastructural pathology serve as an inspiration to all.

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