

There is no question which way George went in his life. Whether it was at work, in the mountains, with his family, or with his friends, George always went one way: up. We all were lucky to have had him.

NICHOLAS B. CLINCH

GILBERT J. ROBERTS, M.D.

1934-2000

Gil Roberts, a fine expedition mountaineer from the 1950s and 1960s, died on July 15, 2000, in Berkeley, California, from cancer at the age of 66. Gil dealt with death in the same uncompromising way he dealt with the other crises in his life and his mountaineering, unblinking and head on. He is survived by his wife, Erica Stone, and his children, David Dorji Roberts, Kathy Roberts, and Kim Roberts.

I first met Gil in the fall of 1951 when he came to Stanford University as a freshman and joined the Alpine Club. He already was an experienced climber, and I used the excuse that he should be checked out as a leader in order to go climbing with him in Yosemite. There were three of us. We were halfway up Washington Column. Gil was in the middle and was sitting on a flake perched on a ledge. I was sitting a foot behind him on the flake. The climber who was leading went out more than 20 feet without protection. He was stopped by a smooth slab and decided to jump for the gully beyond. He leaped, failed to stick, spun, and dropped into space, trailing the rope behind him.

For a moment I thought the flake would come off and we all would end up on the talus. Gil held and the flake held. The nylon rope stretched out like a rubber band and the leader bounced up and down like a yo-yo on the end of a string. Gil's hands were badly blistered but he never let go. Just then I received sudden enlightenment as to where the route went and asked Gil for a belay. All he said was, "Be careful. I don't think I can hold two falls like that in the same day."

It was classic Gil. Face the crisis. Deal with it. Make a few dry remarks and move on. He was made a leader.

He started climbing in 1948 at 14 with the Southern California Rock Climbing Section of the Sierra Club and did numerous climbs at Tahquitz and Yosemite. While still in high school, he made first ascents, including Mt. Smythe in the Canadian Rockies with Chuck and Ellen Wilts, as well as doing climbs such as the East Buttress of Whitney, the East Ridge of Edith Cavell, and the East Ridge of the Grand Teton. Gil was a strong member of the 1954 Stanford Coast Range expedition that made numerous ascents, including several firsts, in the Waddington area. He later made the first winter ascent of the East Buttress of Whitney and an ascent of the Kain Face of Mt. Robson.

Although he was a fine rock climber, his real strength was as an expedition mountaineer. He was the driving force behind the first ascent of the East Ridge of Mt. Logan in 1957, a major achievement for the time.

Gil went to Stanford Medical School, and his medical background plus his mountaineering ability made him a prize candidate for any expedition. After his medical internship, he served two years in the Air Force as a flight surgeon at its survival school in Reno. He was a member of the successful 1958 Hidden Peak expedition, but he and Dick Irvin had to come in after the rest of the party and arrived just as the mountain was climbed.

He joined the 1963 American Mt. Everest expedition and was in the Khumbu Ice Fall fixing the route when a wall of ice collapsed, killing Jake Breitenbach. Gil was a couple of steps

behind Jake, leading a second rope, when he stopped to wipe off his fogging goggles and escaped the falling ice that buried the climbers ahead of him. Gil and Ila Tsering dug out Dick Pownall and Ang Pemba, but then the rope disappeared under the ice and they could do nothing to help Jake.

After Everest, he made various climbs, including Denali, but no further Himalayan expeditions. Instead, he led treks to Nepal for many years and got involved with projects to help the Nepalese. He was one of the early members of the board of Dick Blum's American Himalayan Foundation and was active in its affairs. In his later years, he made many winter ski trips in the Sierra, including a crossing of that range just last year.

Gil had a family medical practice for a while and then for 20 years he was an emergency room doctor at Alta Bates Hospital in Berkeley, at which he excelled. He became involved with mountain medicine courses and seminars, working with such climbing physicians as Charlie Houston, Peter Hackett, and Drummond Rennie.

As with so many climbers, mountains, mountaineering, and mountaineers were a major part of his life. In an oral history interview given to John Rawlings, he concluded his remarks with the following: "...in mountaineering there's a certain simplicity to it which is a good antidote to the society we live in; in general...you can't fake it. You either climb it or you don't. You either get from point A to point B with your load or you don't. You can't kind of shuck and jive about it and get by on pretense as well as you sometimes can in other social situations. So it's clean and I like that part, have liked that part over the years. Not that I do much of that anymore, but I think that almost all of my good friends, I mean, I really don't have any good friends who aren't climbers. There's a certain bond there. Maybe you haven't climbed together all that much, or at all even, but you have a certain common denominator of values and experiences, so that you know a lot about somebody if you know that they're a fellow mountaineer."

In the mountains as in life, some people break trail and some people are content to follow in the footsteps of others. Gil Roberts broke trail. He was one tough mountaineer.

NICHOLAS B. CLINCH

CHARLES MARSHALL PRATT
1939-2000

Ah, Chuck, Chuck, so lately here, so soon gone. How can I be writing this? You, gone? Yes, irrevocably. Your death sudden and shockingly unexpected. It seems not real. Somehow...wrong.

Only a few weeks ago you had phoned me, out of the blue, from Lafayette, a small community nestled in the hills east of Berkeley. You called about the speech I had given last November at the Banff Mountain Summit.

Before putting the phone back in its cradle I told you of a slide show I would be giving the following week in Danville, a town just over the hill from Lafayette. I hoped you would come. I would be proud to have you in the audience. It would be a pleasure to introduce my old climbing companion and to have you actually there when I paid my usual tribute to you as "the best climber of our generation, and the best climbing writer as well." Back when I saw you at the Yosemite Camp 4 Reunion in September, 1999, after an interval of many years, I told you I had been saying that in my talks for a long time, and I noted that you, even you, Chuck, though ever alert to the stealthily cat steps of Pride, seemed pleased, even touched, by the accolade.

I didn't really expect you to come. If you had, you would have been, for a few minutes at