



Mrs. Roselee Nichols Roberts

April 24, 1942 - April 22, 2020

Roselee Nichols Roberts passed away at home of natural causes on April 22, surrounded by her family in McDaniel, MD., on Maryland's Eastern shore. She was 77.

She was born on April 24, 1942 in Baltimore's Hamilton neighborhood to John Sherman Nichols, a World War II engineer, and Mary Ellen Lee, an elementary school teacher.

After the war the family moved to York, Pa., where Nichols was an engineer for the AMF Corp. He died suddenly when Roselee was in eighth grade, and her mother moved the family back to the couple's hometown of Millville, N.J. An honors graduate of Millville High, she entered the University of Miami in 1960 on full scholarship, majoring in engineering and mathematics.

A natural leader, Roselee was on the student government council, joined Chi Omega sorority, and became the first woman to head Miami's Inter-Fraternity Council. She also ran the campus speakers' bureau, bringing, among others, Sargent Shriver, President Kennedy's first Peace Corps director, to the school to recruit volunteers. It was there she met her future husband, William "Art" Roberts. She graduated with honors from the School of Arts and Science with a degree in math and economics in 1964.

Roselee was recruited by AT&T's Southern Bell Co., as its first female in the nationwide upper management training program, and was assigned to its Jacksonville, Fl. office. A year later she came to Washington, DC, to join the Chesapeake and Potomac telephone company.

On Nov. 27, 1965, she and Art wed in Millville, and moved to Reston, Va. Within two years, Roselee was a Junior Economist on President Lyndon Johnson's Council of Economic Advisers, where she met and became dear friends with economist Alice Rivlin. Roselee left the Council to start a family-- daughters Elizabeth and Leigh--and to earn her master's degree in economics from Virginia Tech. She also worked part-time for OMB doing federal budget economic forecasting, and later for the Department of Transportation

on highway safety issues.

In 1978, freshman Rep. Bill Nelson (D-Fl.) tapped Roselee as his budget director and chief aide on the House Budget Committee. By 1982, he'd brought her to the House Science and Technology Committee's Space and Aeronautics subcommittee, which he chaired. But while Nelson was training to become America's first House-based astronaut, she was lured back to the Budget Committee by its chairman, Rep. Bill Gray, D-Pa.

She left the Hill in 1985 to join the McDonnell Douglas legislative affairs office at a time when the aerospace industry was overwhelmingly male and military.

That inspired Roselee and four others to create Women in Aerospace (WIA). Membership was open to women, men and corporations, the better, she said, to network, job hunt and get industry funding for the fledgling group. Roselee became WIA's fourth president in 1988. Today, the group boasts more than 2,000 individual and corporate members.

While promoting space and aeronautics issues for 19 years in the private sector, she founded the industry-led Coalition for Space exploration to support NASA's Moon and Mars programs.

In 2005, she returned to Capitol Hill as staff director for the House Space and Aeronautics subcommittee chair Rep. Ken Calvert, R-Ca., where she led the successful drive to save the International Space Station from the House budgetary ax. On her watch both the House and Senate approved a NASA authorization bill for the first time in five years. "It would not have happened were it not for Roselee," Calvert said.

Her final move was to NASA HQ, as the special assistant to the agency's deputy administrator, where she led a rapid response team for industry and think tanks. After retiring from government in 2010, she and Art moved full-time from Georgetown to their beloved retreat near St. Michael's, Md., where they moored their boat, the *MissAppropriation*. They continued consulting and lobbying through their firm, Washington Advocates.

Surviving Roselee are her husband Art of 54 years, a longtime Washington lobbyist, and their children: Elizabeth (Libby) Roberts Holah and husband, Greg, both architects, and granddaughters Olivia Holah and Violet Holah, all of Portland, Ore; and Leigh Roberts Melton, an attorney and University of Richmond law professor, and husband, John, an educator; granddaughter Harper Melton and grandson Hunter Melton, all of Farmville, Va. Roselee is predeceased by her parents and both brothers.

Given the pandemic, arrangements are in flux. She will be interred at Georgetown's Oak Hill Cemetery, with celebrations of her remarkable life at the Army-Navy Country Club in Arlington, Va., and on the Eastern Shore. Dates will be announced.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests donations to the Roselee N. Roberts Memorial Scholarship Fund, University of Miami, PO Box 025388, Miami, Fl. 33102-981 (please write the fund's name in the memo line) or to "Feed the Kids of Talbot County," Mid-Shore Community Foundation, 102 East Dover Street, Easton, MD. 21601 (please write Feed the Kids of Talbot County in the memo line). All donations are tax deductible and will be acknowledged.