



Achieving the Rare: Robert F Christy's Journey in Physics and Beyond

I-Juliana Christy

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Robert F Christy was a legendary physicist, one of the key players in some of the most dramatic events of the 20th century. He was a student of Oppenheimer, who called him “one of the best in the world.” He was a crucial member of Fermi’s team when they first unleashed the unheard-of energies of nuclear power, creating the world’s first nuclear reactor on December 2, 1942. On the Manhattan Project he was the key physicist in the successful test of the world’s first atomic bomb, the “Christy Gadget”, at Alamogordo on July 16, 1945. Almost immediately he turned his talents to promoting the peaceful uses of atomic energy. He successfully opposed atmospheric testing of atomic bombs and fought nuclear proliferation, a campaign that eventually led to the SALT talks with the Soviet Union. His favorite subject was astrophysics where he made fundamental contributions to the understanding of Cepheids, variable stars that are crucial distance indicators in the universe.

Robert was equally fascinating as a man. In his mid-50’s he became irresistably attracted to an astrophysicist, but they were a continent and a generation apart. Near his 60’s they started a happy and fulfilling life together. He remained vigorous both mentally and physically into his 90’s: he was still galloping his horse at age 93.

Robert's story is one of overcoming obstacles, of hope, and of fulfillment.

Contents:

- His Childhood
- The Formative UBC Years
- Exciting Graduate Years with Oppenheimer
- The First Marriage, to Dagmar von Lieven
- The Very First Nuclear Reactor
- Designing the First Atomic Bomb
- Opposing Nuclear Weapons Proliferation
- Becoming Oppenheimer’s Successor at Caltech
- Contributions to Physics at Caltech
- Pioneering Work in Astrophysics: Variable Stars
- As Provost: Achieving His Dreams for Caltech
- The Second Marriage, to I-Julianne Sackmann
- Daughters Late in Life
- Interim President of Caltech
- Later Years — Teaching and Research
- Radiation Dosimetry in Hiroshima and Nagasaki
- The Spring Valley Ranch: Fulfilling a Dream
- Robert’s Health — Struggles and Successes
- An Innate Grace

Readership: For interested academics as well as the general public.

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Harry Blalock:

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