



## Robert E. DeBarth

March 18, 1927 - November 28, 2021

Robert E. Debarth, devoted father, grandfather, and local businessman, passed away at age ninety-four early Sunday morning, at Lansdale-Abington Hospital.

Robert was a long-time resident and fixture in the Lansdale community, having opened a typewriter repair business in 1945 and later establishing a full-service office machine retail and repair store on N. Broad street in 1954. He began his career as a teenager, traveling on the train into Philadelphia and offering to fix typewriters with nothing more than a small toolkit, slowly earning and saving enough to build a bustling business and create a comfortable life for his family. From the 1950s through the 1980s, Robert's store sold and repaired a wide range of typewriters and adding machines and employed a staff that serviced individuals and businesses throughout Montgomery and surrounding counties.

Although his life was anchored by his love for work, it was defined by family. He married his now-late wife Lillian in 1946 and initially lived in North Wales before moving first to an apartment above his Broad Street store and later building a home nearby. Robert and Lillian had their son, Earl DeBarth, in 1951, who would later become a part of the family business, working alongside (literally) Robert for many years. Later in life, Robert had two grandchildren, Nicole and Adam, whom he and Lillian embraced with unending love and attention. He relished in teaching his grandchildren what

he had learned throughout his life, including lessons of morality and practical skills such as home repairs, gardening, and fishing. With him Nicole learned how to ride a bike and to change a tire. Even well into his seventies, Robert loved hitting baseballs to Adam in the backyard. In his eighties he had two great-children whom he loved to see during the holidays. He was known to some as “Pops”, to his grandchildren as “Pop Pop”, and to many simply as “Bob.”

Robert also had an unquenchable thirst for learning and developing new skills. He was a gifted self-taught machinist and could be reliably found in his garage at one of his many lathes designing a new part for a work project or just because he had an idea. He was at times a voracious reader and his interests ranged from politics, to history, to engineering. His hobbies were similarly varied and seemingly inexhaustible. As a young man he taught himself to paint and later in life painted countless landscapes, many displayed in his home and business. He was a motorcycle enthusiast for many years and often went on long rides with Lillian. He made and sold jewelry and enjoyed playing ping-pong in his basement with others for hours on end. On weekends he would sometimes sit under a tree in his backyard and compose poetry when inspiration struck.

Of all these pastimes, Robert was perhaps most in his element when playing music. He learned guitar by playing country-western songs and became a truly gifted musician in all respects, also teaching himself to play the organ, drums, banjo, mandolin, and harmonica, among others. He told stories of playing and singing with friends all night long in his early years and he loved to play with his brother Jean and sister June at family reunions. His home and business were decorated with instruments of all types, with a guitar never more than arm's reach away. Robert ultimately combined his love of music and mechanics and took up instrument repair and modification in his spare time. In his sixties he taught his grandson Adam how to play guitar and the

two played together for the rest of his life, with Robert ending every song with an emphatic kick in the air and a beaming smile. Not one to slow down, Robert began seeking out others to play music with in his eighties, and for several years had a standing gig on Saturday and Sunday mornings at a local flea market. He even decided to expand his instrumental repertoire around that time and took trombone lessons for several years.

Beginning in the 1990s and continuing several decades, the typewriter repair business experienced a steep decline with the advent of home computers. As typewriter stores across the country closed their doors, Robert never considered shuttering the business that had played such a central part in his life. He woke each morning at 5:00 a.m., arrived for breakfast at the R&S diner by 6:00 a.m., and was at work by 7:30 a.m. five days a week. Perhaps no longer motivated as much by profit, he was carried on by an abiding passion for a craftsmanship that had long ago faded elsewhere but had only grown stronger at his work bench. His persistence ultimately left him as one of the few people left in the U.S. who had the knowledge and tools to understand and restore vintage typewriters and in the last ten years he experienced a return in business that was clearly fulfilling and self-affirming,

Even in recent years as he slowed a bit, Robert lived as though he had no concept of age. At ninety-four, he still lived at home, still drove his car each day, and still maintained the several properties he owned. He was still learning new things, including making bread and fixing vintage machines he had never seen before. He continued making new friends, looked forward to seeing his grandchildren and great grand-children when they returned home, and was thrilled when his son returned home to live with him. He went to eat dinner every week at the home of his daughter-in-law Mimi - whom he affectingly referred to as "My Angel" – and her husband Clive. Even in the midst of numerous health complications and trips to the hospital, Robert returned to his

store for several weeks in October and, just as he had for seventy-six years, got back to work. When the doors closed behind him for the last time, they closed on an era, but certainly not on his memory. Robert E. Debarth is survived by his son Earl, his grandchildren Nicole and Adam, his great-grandchildren Tyler and Lilly, and by the community he served.

# Cemetery Details

## Whitemarsh Memorial Park

1169 Limekiln Pike  
Ambler, PA 19002

# Previous Events

## Gathering

DEC 2. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (ET)

Shelly-Dinan Funeral Home  
24 E. Main St.  
Lansdale, PA 19446  
(215) 855-3622  
<https://www.dinanfuneralhome.com>

# Tribute Wall



“ *Robert E. DeBarth*

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February 03, 2023 at 04:11 AM



“ *I found this after surfing around "MapCrunch" where it randomly took me inside this remarkable store "Robert E DeBarth Typewriters and Service". So curious, I had to look around, saw Mr. DeBarth and was charmed. That led me here where I delighted in learning about his remarkable life. Had to write a note. Blessings from Texas, what a man, what a life :)*



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**TxRN** - July 02, 2022 at 02:48 PM