



Dr. Roy Menninger

October 27, 1926 - October 24, 2024

Roy Wright Menninger, physician, community leader, CEO and avid student of history, died Oct. 24, 2024, three days shy of his 98th birthday, at Stormont Vail Hospital in Topeka, Kansas.

A native of Topeka and the grandchild of a horse-and-buggy prairie doctor who, with his own two sons, started the world-renowned Menninger Clinic in Topeka in 1919, Dr. Roy Menninger devoted his life to family, patients, his community and the public's understanding of mental health.

Dr. Roy was a gifted communicator, but he listened more than he talked. Whether sharing an informal lunch with employees or meeting with political leaders or Hollywood luminaries, Dr. Roy treated everyone with the same level of compassion and respect. He accumulated much wisdom in life and had a low-key but direct way of sharing powerful insights that could ease troubled hearts and worried minds.

Roy was born in Topeka on Oct. 27, 1926, to William Claire Menninger and Catharine Wright Menninger. The eldest of three brothers, he was an accomplished Boy Scout. He earned his first merit badge for horsemanship at age 13 and became an Eagle Scout just two years later. Roy also showed an early love for music, learning the piano and later the cello, which he played as an adult in the local civic orchestra for nearly 20 years. His boyhood dream

was to become a locomotive engineer.

During the dark, early days of World War II, Roy was upset that others were serving their country but he was not. So he decided to secretly enlist at age 16. His father was away in Washington, D.C., serving, ironically, as Chief of the U.S. Army Medical Corps' Psychiatric Division. As fate would have it, the recruiting officer in Topeka recognized his prominent name and refused his application.

Roy attended Washburn University and George Washington University before graduating from Swarthmore College in 1947. He then entered Cornell Medical School and graduated in 1951. His father, Dr. Will, delivered the commencement address. Dr. Roy served his residency at Boston State Hospital before transferring to Boston Psychiatric Hospital.

In 1951, Dr. Roy married Ann Catherine Colwell of Morristown, New Jersey. The couple had four children. Their marriage ended in divorce in 1972.

Dr. Roy was drafted into the U.S. Army and was eventually stationed at the 109th Field Hospital in Salzburg, Austria. It was actually his second trip to Austria: the first came in the summer of 1949, when he took a solo bicycle tour of post-war Europe. In a miscalculation he never forgot, he overshot the Allied occupation zone and found himself riding amid a column of Soviet tanks. A quick adjustment had him peddling fast across fields and woods, where he safely slipped back to the West.

After his service, Dr. Roy returned to the Boston area in 1955 and completed his training at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital. Through the late 1950s, Dr. Roy and several other local physicians had become increasingly alarmed by the arms race between the U.S. and the Soviet Union and the growing prospect of nuclear war.

To demonstrate their concerns and dramatize the blast radius of an atomic detonation, the group led a peace walk from suburban Waltham to Faneuil Hall in downtown Boston, nearly 10 miles distant. In time, the group would attract other physicians, grow in size and ultimately formalize their association as Physicians for Social Responsibility.

Dr. Roy assumed leadership of the Menninger Foundation in 1967, following the death of his father, Dr. Will. His family's legacy and the new responsibilities loomed large for the 41-year-old physician. Roy's father and uncle, Dr. Karl, had long been nationally recognized leaders in the mental health field and had built the family clinic into one of just a handful nationwide devoted to behavioral health research, education and treatment.

Dr. Roy learned quickly on the job, winning over innumerable skeptics and guiding the foundation for the next quarter century as he juggled the competing demands of managing a complex organization while raising funds to ensure its survival. Through it all, meeting the needs and expectations of patients was his central objective.

He was similarly committed to the well-being of the many talented and diverse individuals that made up the foundation's staff, and his personal affection for them was genuine. He pushed hard to foster a work environment of mutual respect, intellectual curiosity and enthusiasm for the mission at hand.

Unfortunately, health care was changing in the 1980s and '90s and the window for treating patients became increasingly brief as insurers demanded a limited, empirically quantifiable care regime. The foundation's long-standing focus on individualized care fell out of favor and the organization struggled. Succeeded in leadership by his brother, Walter, in 1993, Dr. Roy continued to

serve as Chairman of The Trustees until 2003, when the Menninger Foundation dissolved and The Menninger Clinic moved to Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

In 1973, Dr. Roy married Beverly Miller Ohse. Over the next 50 years, their enduring love story weathered near-constant travel on behalf of the foundation. When off of the road, Roy ardently pursued his love of stamp collecting. He also was a great reader and a life-long student of the writer Samuel Johnson, considered one of the most distinguished men of letters in English history.

His interest in Johnson underscored his relentless intellectual curiosity, and he never stopped reading and learning and using his mind. History was very much alive to him. He could easily articulate parallels between current events and the past, as well as the lessons contained therein.

His thirst for knowledge was unquenchable. Late in life and long-since confined to a wheelchair, he began teaching himself both Vietnamese and Ukrainian to better communicate with several caregivers at Brewster Place, his home for the last eight years.

Perhaps his greatest accomplishment was the courage, determination and grace he showed in fending off a disease that slowly but inexorably robbed him of virtually every muscle in his body. Across more than 10 years, he never complained but instead focused on developing work-arounds to carry on with his broken body. His will was iron. When a physician at one point told him his odds for living another six months were considerably less than 50-50, he marked six months out on the calendar and basically said, "Watch me." He lived another two years.

Dr. Roy was preceded in death by his parents, William and Catharine, and his

brother, Phillip. He is survived by his wife, Beverly, his brother, Walter, and a blended family that includes Heather Visscher (Kirk), Pacific Grove, CA; Brent (Victoria), Overland Park, KS; Ariel McInerney (Joe), Cool, CA; Bonar (Ann), Merriam, KS; Fred (Julie), Lawrence, KS; Eric (Karen Hacker), Atlanta; Beth Ann, Topeka, as well as seven grandchildren: Hana Mayeda, New York City; Elias Menninger, New York City; Nathaniel Menninger, Atlanta; Wyatt Ohse, Chicago; Henry Ohse, Kansas City; Clare McInerney, San Francisco; and Grace Menninger, New York City.

A celebration for the life of Dr. Roy Menninger will be 10 a.m. Saturday, December 14, at Grace Episcopal Cathedral, 701 SW 8th Street, Topeka, Kansas 66603.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests donations to Doctors Without Borders. You can go directly there with this link, https://t.ly/iKLD_. or sent in care of Kevin Brennan Family Funeral Home, 2801 SW Urish Road, Topeka, Kansas 66614.

Condolences may be sent online to www.kevinbrennanfamily.com

Previous Events

A Celebration of Life

DEC 14. 10:00 AM (CT)

Grace Episcopal Cathedral
701 SW 8th Avenue
Topeka, KS 66603

Tribute Wall

ST

“ I have such fond memories of Dr. Roy Menninger.

He was my late beloved mother's (Janet Jahn Titus, BSN, RN) Psychiatrist at McLean Hospital whilst she became President, Peter Bent Brigham Hospital School of Nursing '59.

I reached out to him throughout my years of caring for my mother. My mother had high praise for him and he was extremely comforting and helpful to my mother and me.

I have even stopped by McLean to introduce myself to Dr. Eliza Menninger.

Dr. Roy Menninger was so compassionate and he will be gratefully missed by many people. My sincere condolences to his family, friends, patients, and colleagues.

Gratefully yours,

~ Stephen Titus, Ph.D. (A.B.Def.), M.Phil., MPH
Box 228 Hull, MA 02045-0228
(617) 549-0201



Stephen Philip Titus - March 16 at 07:32 PM

“ A Life of Caring Part One

A Tribute to Roy Menninger, my long time Teacher, Colleague and Friend.

I clearly remember Dr. Roy frequently talking about the phrase “I care”. I first heard him speak about it at an all staff meeting in 1974, when I was a newly hired psychiatrist at the Menninger Clinic in Topeka, Kansas. Dr. Roy was sharing a lot of concerns about it becoming a “catch phrase”, as he saw it frequently on billboards along the highways. He wondered how much and how sincerely these businesses “care”. To care has very serious meanings and implications, so how is it so frequently and casually placed in commercials and advertisements? Dr. Roy ended this meeting with a plea to all the staff (and to himself) to devote ourselves to truly caring for our patients. I remember feeling impressed yet puzzled after the meeting adjourned.

During the 1980’s the Menninger name was being recognized as a leading teaching institution in the US and internationally. In part this perhaps was due to Dr. Takeo Doi, who was the first international student from Japan. Dr. Doi studied at Menninger in 1953, and went on to start a psychoanalytic seminar at Tokyo University (Todai). He became a Professor at Todai and was later honored in Topeka as a Distinguished Alumnus and trustee. In the 1980’s other psychiatrists from a few private universities in Japan came to Menninger to learn. In kind, they invited us to come and present workshops there, mainly in the cities of Tokyo, Osaka, and Fukuoka.

Dr. Roy and I made whirlwind trips to Japan a few times every year. I was appointed the Director of Intercultural Teaching Programs at that time. We typically brought other distinguished Menninger clinicians with us. On one occasion, Dr. Roy was alarmed after finding out that several of us were on the same plane. He was worried about the plane crashing with all of us on board. I was touched by his concern and worry for our collective safety.

During one of these trips, Dr. Roy told me that his involvement in Japanese psychiatry actually traced back to his father, William Menninger. William Menninger was a chief consultant in psychiatry and neurology under the surgeon general of the U.S. army during those chaotic yet hopeful years right after WW II. He was involved in surveying the psychiatric situation in Japan. Dr. Roy cared about maintaining traditions. As I was interested in this also, I mentioned this to him. He looked at me and nodded but did not give any further response. His eyes looked pensive as if looking back over those years. I found this moment to be somehow inspiring.

Dr. Roy was like a “big brother” to us on these trips. He made sure we took time to walk around and enjoy the cities and made sure we took care of ourselves. One time when we were in Osaka, we had been walking around for quite a while. Dr. Roy brought us all over to some street vendors that were selling grilled chicken on a stick. We were all hungry so were grateful for the break. We continued to walk leisurely while eating.

Tetsuro “Tate” Takahashi

Brent Menninger - December 16, 2024 at 05:21 PM

“ A Life of Caring Part Two

As time went on, other psychiatric institutions and universities across the world started contacting us to learn from our experiences. Other Institutions in the US actually started similar programs. In particular we had a lot of interest from other Asian and pacific rim countries, such as Korea, Indonesia, China and India. Dr. Roy was hoping to develop a Pacific Rim Psychodynamic Network. One of the distinguished psychiatrists from Japan upon hearing this vision exclaimed “This is truly a grand presidential concept!” However due to the recession in the 1990’s this was not a vision that could be realized at the time.

In any case, over thirty psychiatric professionals in Japan alone were trained in this program. Upon his retirement from being the president of the Menninger Foundation, these Japanese psychiatrists invited him to come visit so they could express their appreciation for all that he had done for them. He served as president for 26 years, from the ages of 41 to 67 years old. He told the alumni that he had started working clinically again and was greatly enjoying this endeavor. I alone applauded. When I mentioned this to him later, he said “I think it was because no one else know how much I just wanted to be a clinician.” He was a natural clinician and although he was splendid administrator, his heart was always in the clinical work, where he could care for the individual person.

Dr. Roy was also known as an avid student of history. He was once invited to give a lecture in Sapporo, the capitol city of Hokkaido, the northernmost island of Japan. Dr. Roy started with Santayana’s admonition that those who forget history are doomed to repeat it. He spoke about the treatment of psychiatric chronic patients who were left behind after each revolutionary progress in psychiatric treatment. He emphasized our continued efforts and hope. I was so moved by his lecture that I inadvertently spoke out, “I wish I could have heard this lecture in Topeka!” He replied “You had to come to

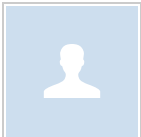
Sapporo!", with a mild chuckle. I detected a hint of sadness in his reply.

Dr. Roy once told me that if he were to be reborn, he would like to be an orchestra conductor. During the time I worked with him, he demonstrated in all of his different roles, duties, responsibilities what true "caring" was about by his actions. He was indeed already a conductor of sorts, and he raised this to an artform. As a music conductor simultaneously is able to hear the whole and to pay attention to the individual instruments, Dr. Roy was able to do this with all of the staff and patients he worked with through the years.

Before his death, Dr. Roy called his beloved wife, Beverly, and his younger son, Brent, to him to discuss with them what he wanted in his funeral. Until the very end he was caring not just for himself but for those closest to him. He truly lived a life full of grand accomplishments but most importantly he demonstrated the lifelong art of caring. Rest in peace, my friend.

Tetsuro "Tate" Takahashi

Brent Menninger - December 16, 2024 at 05:20 PM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Dr. Roy Menninger.

December 11, 2024 at 07:27 PM

“ I was saddened to learn of Dr. Roy Menninger’s passing last week. I had the privilege and pleasure of being “stand partners” with him in the cello section of the Topeka Civic Symphony (as it was known back then) in the 1968-69 season, my senior year in high school. I recall my parents commenting that it was really cool that Dr. Roy had just recently begun taking cello lessons, at the ripe old age of 40-something, and had become proficient enough to perform with the Symphony. Usually it is easier for youngsters to learn musical skills than it is for an older person, but he had decided he wanted to play the cello and so he did it!

At that time, Dr. Roy was taking lessons from Dr. Warren Walker, cello instructor at K-State. He got me lined up for lessons with Dr. Walker as well, and once a week he would drive us over to Manhattan for our lessons. One night on our way home it was a bit later than usual. Suddenly we heard a siren and a highway patrol’s lights came up behind us. Dr. Roy dutifully pulled over, and noticed that our speed had gotten up to around 90 miles per hour! The officer politely asked to see Dr. Roy’s driver’s license. Upon seeing the name, he exclaimed something to the effect of “Oh, Doctor! Are you on your way to an emergency house call?” Dr. Roy admitted that no, he just hadn’t noticed how fast he was going (and later joked that he should have gone along with the officer’s assumption). That’s a fun memory that sticks in my mind.

Over the ensuing years I saw Dr. Roy only a handful of times, but he always recognized me from those Civic Symphony rehearsals and concerts... and our lessons with Warren Walker. The last time I saw him was in September, 2011 at the Kansas Book Fair. I was there for my dad, George Paris, who had won a Notable Book Award for his historical novel “A Distant Home.” Dr. Roy’s son, Bonar, had also received an award for his book about the 1966 Topeka tornado, “And Hell Followed With It.” Roy was in a wheelchair but continued to get out and about as much as possible. And he did remember me when I introduced myself.

May you Rest in Peace and Pride, Dr. Roy, for an accomplished life well-lived, respected and admired.

Jenith Paris Hoover

Jenith Paris Hoover - October 28, 2024 at 01:15 PM

VF

Sweet memories. Doc Roy made THS Alumni Lunches in wheel chair even. Thanks Jen.

V Kay Foster - October 30, 2024 at 12:30 AM

CR

He lived a full life and his work will always be remembered. He was a trailblazer in the field of mental health. He will be missed by many. His contributions will always be remembered. C.K.Renkel

Constance Renkel - November 02, 2024 at 09:00 PM

RC

“*Dr. Roy's life story is an inspiration to many of us, a true Renaissance man. I share my condolences with family and friends. Roy was a kind and generous mentor in 2006 as I was getting acquainted with my role as a mental health advocate in Kansas. He provided me with a solid foundation to understand the complex social and political relationships central to being effective in this field along with understanding the history of mental health care in the state. I appreciate his determination to live a full life to the end and I will miss his gentle counsel.*

Rick Cagan

Rick Cagan - October 27, 2024 at 08:16 AM

CW

“ I had the privilege of getting acquainted with Dr. Roy Menninger while serving as executive staff for the Kansas Branch of the American Psychiatric Association. He had a way of providing valuable advice without being critical. He was always an inspiration to me. I will never forget his thoughtful, kind guidance.

Charles "Chip" Wheelen - October 26, 2024 at 07:28 AM

AW

“ Our community has lost a giant of a human being who has served with compassion and love.

anita wolgast - October 25, 2024 at 02:18 PM



MY DEEPEST CONDOLENCES TO DR. ROY'S FAMILY AND FRIENDS.. I KNEW DR. KARL MENNENGER IN THE LATE 70's. HE WAS AFFILIATED WITH DR. FOLSOM THROUGH THE VA, HERE IN TOPEKA. DR. FOLSOM'S GAVE MANY PARTIES WHICH I HELPED WITH.. DR. KARL WAS USUALLY THERE. SEND PRAYERS. 🙏🙏🙏🙏

Barbara Duran - October 25, 2024 at 02:37 PM

BL

“ Bonar,

Sorry to hear about your dad's passing my friend. Penny and my hearts go out to you, Ann, and Grace.

Let me share my first memory of Dr. Roy. Back in junior high, you and I were in your room one evening listening to music and you decided to max the volume for the song 'Smoke on the Water'. After a while, your dad opened the door, and with a stoic indifference, paused and calmly said, "please turn that down". I knew then that there was something unique and special about him.

Bill & Penny Long

Bill Long - October 25, 2024 at 11:06 AM

LR

“ *I was so sorry to hear of your loss. My Dad, Basil Cole works at the Menninger Foundation from the late 1940's or early 1950's until he retired. Scot & Marie Smith helped get donations for the foundations were closes friends to my parents as well as God Parents to my three children. I had met Dr. Roy from time to time over the years, as well as Dr. Will & Dr Karl as I grow up. I'm so sad to hear of Dr. Roy passing, he was always very kind to visit with me when I went over to talk with him. Linda Cole Rubow daughter of Ruth & Basil E. Cole.*

Linda Cole Rubow - October 25, 2024 at 11:06 AM

CT

“ *What a remarkable man! We share in mourning your family's loss.*

Chuck and Carol Torrence - October 25, 2024 at 09:54 AM

PE

“ I was very blessed to have the privilege of working with Dr Roy as his physical therapist approximately seven years ago and through the latter years of his life. He was a man who rarely complained and had a fierce determination to overcome his physical obstacles. He was a man that enjoyed an intellectual and medical explanation of how to safely work his body to maximize his mobility first and then proceeded to give 100% of his abilities to accomplish the task at hand. I greatly admired him and was inspired by his determination! I am saddened by the loss of this great man. He touched many lives and will be remembered.

Sincerely, Pam Ebert, PT

Pam Enert - October 25, 2024 at 07:58 AM

SJ

“ I write with a heavy heart to express my deepest condolences on the passing of Dr. Roy Menninger. His life was a testament to dedication, compassion, and groundbreaking contributions to the field of psychiatry.

Dr. Menninger's journey began in a family that understood the profound impact of mental health, a legacy he carried with grace and integrity. His impressive academic achievements and service in the U.S. Army showcased his commitment to healing, both in body and spirit.

As he took on roles at esteemed institutions, his influence expanded, particularly at the Menninger Clinic, which flourished under his leadership. His vision helped shape not only the clinic but also the broader understanding of psychiatric care. He was a pioneer in addressing complex issues surrounding suicide, stress, and personal satisfaction—topics that resonate deeply in our society today.

The warmth and hope he brought to countless lives through his work will be felt for generations. His passion for expanding mental health resources and ensuring comprehensive care is a legacy that will continue to inspire those of us who follow in his footsteps.

During this difficult time, may we all find comfort in the memories of Dr. Menninger and the profound impact he had on so many. Please know that my prayers are with you all as you navigate this loss.

*With heartfelt sympathy, Chaplain Salvador Delmundo Jr
The Menninger Clinic, Houston Texas*

salvador delmundo Jr - October 24, 2024 at 11:41 PM

RS

“ *Bev and Family,
I am so sorry to hear of Roy's passing. I will always treasure the opportunities I had to visit with you and him. I marveled at his kindness, wit and generous spirit. May he rest in peace.*

Rick Strecker - October 24, 2024 at 09:32 PM

JS

May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

Jackie Sommers - October 24, 2024 at 10:50 PM

LM

*Dear Bev and Family,
I struggle to find words to express the extent of my sadness to contemplate the depth of your loss and pain in Roy's death. I grieve and mourn very deeply alongside you. We have all lost a most wonderful man, husband, father, and dear friend.*

He touched so many lives profoundly, and left a legacy that lives on in all who knew, loved, admired, and respected him.

I pray that you may find comfort in your memories.....and that the passage of time may afford you a measure of peace.

*With great sorrow, and with fondness,
Lorne*

Lorne M. Ruby, MD - November 01, 2024 at 04:04 PM

PB

“ *Bonar, Ann & Grace, I'm so sorry for your loss. What a wonderful full life well lived!! Sending our love & prayers.*

Pamela Cain Beckom - October 24, 2024 at 08:05 PM