

On May 12, 2010, Felix Kunhardt Knauth sailed off to his next great adventure. Lost at sea, but not forgotten, he will be fondly remembered by the many people he touched around the world during his long and full life.

Felix was born September 25, 1929 in Roxbury, MA. At an early age, he was afflicted with severe polio and hospitalized for the better part of 5 years. The illness had a profound effect on him, both physically and emotionally, inculcating a thirst for adventure and a commitment to helping those in need that set him on a unique path. He learned to sail while recuperating from polio, while his mobility was still limited, and he later said that sailing allowed him a sense of freedom that he otherwise could not enjoy.

He graduated from Tabor Academy in Marion, Massachusetts in 1949. While attending Stanford University, where he obtained his BA in History and English in 1953 and his MA in Education the following year, he joined the Stanford Alpine Club, initiating a lifelong love of mountains and climbing. He climbed with the assistance of an orthopedic boot and a steel brace on the leg left shortened by polio. He made first ascents of several peaks in California's Yosemite Valley, including a new route on the famously difficult Mendel couloir in 1958. He was part of the first team to scale El Capitan in 1959, and spent a year in Switzerland as a freelance guide. Late one night, he and a friend climbed one of the towers of the Golden Gate Bridge.

His career intermingled both domestic and foreign work, but each job involved some element of service. In 1960 he won a Fulbright Lectureship and moved to Pakistan, where he learned Urdu and taught in a university there. His next job was with the US Peace Corps, where he worked from 1962 to 1969, first in India developing a training program for new Peace Corps volunteers, and later as the Country Director in Somalia. During that period his three children were born. He and his family returned to the US, and Felix worked for the District of Columbia until 1978, ultimately as Director of Family Services, a role focused on services for neglected children and battered women. Later jobs included Headmaster of a private school, co-founder of a travel company leading treks to India/Zanskar and Pakistan/Baltistan, and founding member and treasurer of Oxfam America.

Felix returned to sailing in 1988, when he purchased an Aries 32' sailboat in California and christened her the "Black Sheep". He refreshed his sailing skills along the West Coast, heading as far south as Mexico. In 1993, he sailed the 'Sheep with a single crewman from Maine to Ireland in a 27-day crossing of the North Atlantic. Over the next 3 years, he sailed to Scotland, the Faroes, Denmark, the Aland Islands and Sweden, where he sold the boat. He expected that to be the end of his sailing days, but he heard the call of the sea again and purchased a new boat in April of 2010, calling her "Rose". His last trip began on May 12, 2010, with a planned sail from Monterey Bay, California to San Simeon. Where it ends, we cannot know; his Rose continues to drift unmanned on the waters of the Pacific.

Felix was a unique and inspirational figure to his children, co-workers and friends. He applied his boundless energy to helping the disadvantaged. He loved his family. Blessed with an ample intellect, he had a tremendous capacity to learn new things and new places. And most impressively, he did not simply overcome the traumas of polio, but embraced them as the source of a drive and ambition that led him to cover, on foot or by boat, large swaths of the planet. He will be missed.

Felix is survived by a sister, three children and seven grandchildren. A memorial service will be held at 1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto, CA on June 5, 2010 at 2 p.m. All are welcome. In lieu of traditional remembrances, please consider a contribution to Oxfam America.