Robert Arceci ’80 (PhD), ’81M (MD): ‘An Abrupt End to a Remarkable Career’

When Robert Arceci died in a tragic motorcycle accident on his way to work last June, it marked an abrupt end to a remarkable career. A physician and researcher who studied childhood hematologic malignancies for more than 30 years, Bob was highly regarded for his insight into childhood hematologic malignancies and his unusual gift for helping young patients and their families through a most difficult period.

After graduating Phi Beta Kappa from Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1972, Bob spent his next nine years in the MD/PhD program at Rochester. While I was busy shuttling back and forth from the River Campus to the Medical Center library from 1973 to 1977, working toward my bachelor’s degree in neuroscience, Bob was earning his PhD in molecular and developmental biology. If I did see him on campus, it must have been in passing, perhaps in those countless hours in the library. Nevertheless, we never actually met.

It was in 1988 that I first met Bob. He was a fellow in pediatric hematology/oncology at the Harvard-affiliated Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston. I remember doing experiments in his lab at Dana-Farber and riding on his motorcycle back to

PEDIATRIC ONCOLOGIST: Arceci is remembered as a giant in the field, with a subspecialty in blood cancers.

his house, where I met his wife, Jeanie, and two children, John and Andrew. It was a memorable and cherished time. We went on to publish three papers together on resistance to cancer drugs.

Bob left Harvard in 1994, and after several other appointments, including one as director and King Fahd Professor of Pediatric Oncology at Johns Hopkins, relocated in 2013 to Phoenix. I caught up with Bob again that year. At the same time he was beginning his new roles—professor of pediatrics at the University of Arizona, director of the Children’s Center for Cancer and Blood Disorders, and the first director of the Ronald A. Matricaria Institute of Molecular Medicine at Phoenix Children’s Hospital—Bob had a long history with the organization and became a valuable guide to me in my new role. Following Bob’s death, the LLS named a five-year, $550,000 grant, the Robert Arceci Career Development Award, in his honor.

Over his career, Bob maintained an active research laboratory, clinical practice, and taught countless students. He published more than 140 papers, and served as editor-in-chief of the journal Pediatric Blood & Cancer. Perhaps more importantly, he was thoughtful and generous with his time. He had a uniquely gentle way about him that made him an incredible human being, researcher, and physician. —LEE GREENBERGER ’77

Greenberger is the chief scientific officer of the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society.