



In Loving Memory
WILLIAM J. FISCHER

FEBRUARY 23, 1980 – APRIL 16, 2024



May 4, 2024, 3:00 p.m.

Robert E Evans Funeral Home • 16000 Annapolis Road, Bowie, MD

Obituary

William Jack Fischer, a loving father, husband, community leader and accomplished scientist, died April 16 in New Carrollton, Maryland. He was 44.

Fischer was born February 23, 1980 in Canton, OH, to Orvie and Sue Fischer. He graduated from Marietta (Ohio) High School as valedictorian in 1997, and received a bachelor's degree in astrophysics from the University of Toledo in 2001 and a doctorate in astronomy from the University of Massachusetts Amherst in 2008. At Toledo, he met his future wife, Meredith Gray, when they worked together at Ritter Planetarium. They married in 2003 and spent their lives together.

A passionate fan of astronomy and all sciences from his youngest days, Fischer dedicated his career to unwinding the mysteries of space. His research focused on figuring out how and why stars are born, and his investigations took him to elite astronomy institutions in Hawaii, Chile and Germany. In 2024 alone, he had five research publications, including one as lead author.

At the time of his death, he was deputy manager of the Hubble Space Telescope's Cosmic Origins Spectrograph team at the Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore. He had recently been promoted to scientist. Prior to that, he spent time as a postdoctoral fellow at NASA Goddard Space Flight Center and the University of Toledo. As an academic, Fischer especially valued teaching and public outreach, pushing himself and colleagues to explain their work and its importance in ways lay people can understand.

"Even as a first-year graduate student he exhibited many of the traits that would make him a successful scientist," said Suzan Edwards, a mentor and advisor. "He had a deep curiosity about scientific questions, and a surprising equanimity in the face of solving what seemed like intractable problems. When others would have been consumed with irritation, frustration or even irate, Will calmly sorted through the issues."

Fischer was an active volunteer with the Bowie High School marching band, which included his beloved daughter Anna. He absolutely loved being a "band dad" and couldn't wait for the next marching band season. He played the trombone and frequently attended concerts across a diverse range of genres, from classical to folk to rock, and he took a strong interest in developing Anna's interests across art, politics, science and music.

He was a champion of social justice causes and sought ways to combat the problems of food insecurity, environmental injustice and economic inequality. He served as a Bowie poll worker during elections. He loved European travel, following the Pittsburgh sports teams (increasingly also the Baltimore Orioles in his adopted home of Maryland), politics, philosophy and running.

Friends and coworkers remembered his humility, kindness and quiet wit.

"In a field of big egos, rivalries, and personal ambitions, Will had one of the most unassuming and understated personalities, very rare in astronomy," said Greg Herczeg, a colleague and friend. "This in some ways was a bit limiting. He wasn't someone to show off, so he was not necessarily well known among astronomers outside his field. But that just wasn't in his personality. I think he enjoyed life and work more by focusing on the science and also supporting others. He was such a gentle and kind person."

Fischer is preceded in death by his mother, Charlotte Sue Fischer, four grandparents and his sister-in-law Mandy Jenkins.

He is survived by his wife, Meredith Gray Fischer and daughter Anna Fischer (Bowie, MD), his brother, Ben Fischer (Brooklyn, NY), his father, Orvie Fischer (Marietta, OH); his aunt Peggy Oancea and uncle Scott Oancea (Marietta, OH), his mother and father in law, Barbara and Tom Gray (Wellington, OH), sister-in-law Michelle Fedor, nephews Evander and Emory Fedor and niece Marin Fedor (Wellington, OH), and cats Freddie and Leaf.

Order of Service

OPENING MUSIC *Daybreak — Ola Gjeilo*

WELCOME *Chaplain Annie Owens*

POEMS *Something Beautiful Remains*
Martha Vashti Pearson

Eulogy from a Physicist (adapted)
Aaron Freeman

MUSICAL SELECTION *Turn, Turn, Turn — Pete Seeger*
(Please join together in song.)

EULOGY *Meredith Gray Fischer*

REFLECTION *Chris Haas*

EULOGY *Ben Fischer*

FINAL THOUGHTS *Chaplain Annie Owens*

CLOSING MUSIC *Over the Rainbow*
Israel Kamakawiwo'ole

Our Sincere Thanks

Memorial contributions in lieu of flowers can be made to the National Alliance on Mental Illness - Maryland Chapter: <http://namimd.org/donate>, or the Bowie High School Band, Bowie High School, Attn: Finance Office, 15200 Annapolis Rd, Bowie, MD 20715.

If you or someone you know needs help, visit <https://988lifeline.org> or call or text the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at 988.

Group Sing

Turn, Turn, Turn — *Pete Seeger*

To everything (Turn, turn, turn)
There is a season (Turn, turn, turn)
And a time to every purpose under heaven

A time to be born, a time to die
A time to plant, a time to reap
A time to kill, a time to heal
A time to laugh, a time to weep

To everything (Turn, turn, turn)
There is a season (Turn, turn, turn)
And a time to every purpose under heaven

A time to build up, a time to break down
A time to dance, a time to mourn
A time to cast away stones
A time to gather stones together

To everything (Turn, turn, turn)
There is a season (Turn, turn, turn)
And a time to every purpose under heaven



This image from Will's research shows protostars still in their formation process; it is part of the Orion Nebula star-forming region. The image was taken by the European Herschel Space Observatory in far-infrared wavelengths, which are not blocked by the surrounding dust and allow us to more directly see the protostars. Using infrared images to understand stellar and planet formation was at the core of Will's research.

"The nitrogen in our DNA, the calcium in our teeth, the iron in our blood, the carbon in our apple pies were made in the interiors of collapsing stars. We are made of starstuff." —Carl Sagan