



## IN MEMORIAN: ROBERT G. HOOPES

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Very likely most of our current faculty at Oakland University do not know the name of Bob Hoopes, who died September 11, 2008. It's understandable: although he came to OU in 1957, the charter year, he left in 1970—for U-Mass, Boston, and later Amherst, where he taught until his retirement.

Yet, he was the first “Dean of the Faculty,” and had a more decisive hand in recruiting, shaping, and inspiring the faculty in the University's first years than anyone other than the legendary Woody Varner himself.

I came to know him slightly in 1963 (I drove my then girl friend out through the rural emptiness of Oakland County [“Where *is* this place?”] for her interview with Bob) and came to know him much better when we were both in London in 1967—he, on sabbatical; I, a student at the University of London. And then he hired me as an Instructor in the English Department at OU in 1969 (where I stayed very happily for 35 years—and thus am forever indebted to Bob for that happiness).

Bob was my very idea and ideal of an English professor. He certainly had the creds: Cornell, Yale, Harvard; author of a major scholarly work *Right Reason in the English Renaissance*, a man who seemed to know Milton by heart. He was also a rather glamorous member of “the greatest generation”: he was a pilot in the Marines Air Corp, flying transit planes into all the danger zones of the South Pacific in World War II.

He was a generous-minded man, who was really interested in people. He encouraged without the least hint of mentorly condescension. He was a serious scholar, administrator, and teacher.

And Bob was funny. He was very, very funny. The small faculty, huddled round the few buildings of those early years, naturally knew, and perforce entertained, each other. Invited to some of their parties, I learned that they entertained each other very well indeed. Parties! There were wonderful parties at that time. Bob and his wife Margaret (known always as Miggie) hosted and attended many of them. Sometimes the conversations made you think you were in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. And, sometimes, Bob, who had a surprising—and usually hidden—talent as an actor, would yank us into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century with one of his impersonations. His Truman Capote might have gotten *him* the part in the movie.

The early years of Oakland University are recounted and analyzed in David Riesman's famous book *Academic Values and the Mass Market Place: The Early Years of Oakland and Monteith*. (Monteith's was Wayne State's attempt to create a brilliant inner college—an experiment that, obviously, did not work out.) While Oakland has grown much larger and has had to deal with the conflict of academic values and the market place, it still possesses, in its heart and history, something of that initial spark. There are many reasons to account for the intellectual excitement, the fun, the experimental thrills, and the serious dedication of the Oakland of those years. One of the most brilliant of those reasons was Bob Hoopes. Requiescat in Pace.

—Brian Murphy