



Mr. Robert E. Rhodes

May 19, 1927 - September 24, 2016

Born in Cortland, NY, on 19 May 1927, to Herbert and Stella Gorick Rhodes, and died in Cortland, NY, on 24 September 2016, after a long battle with heart disease, surrounded by his loving family.

Growing up, Robert's life followed the normal course of a boy in small-town Cortland, but the decade from September 1943 to June 1953 saw him live a fuller life than most people live over several decades. At age 16, he dropped out of St. Mary's High School with two classmates, hoping to enter military service. That failing, he started a series of local jobs in Cortland, beginning with Brockway Motor Company, that went on to include Wickwire Brothers, Brewer Tichner, Cobakco, Overhead Door, Sun Pipeline, Mohican Market, Cortland Laundry, The Cortland Standard, Neil Craig Landscaping, Marshall Construction Company and the US Post Office.

Other events intervened for a period. In February 1945, at age 17, he convinced the local draft board in Tucson, AZ, that he was 18 and requested immediate induction. After basic infantry training, he served in the Philippines, first in the infantry, then in the Corps of Engineers, until honorable discharge in December 1946.

Robert returned to Cortland and to St. Mary's High School, graduating in June 1947, and worked at some of the local jobs above until May 1949, when he

left Cortland with \$50 in his pocket to spend several months traveling to many states by hitchhiking and riding freight trains, sometimes sleeping in hobo camps and occasionally working at odd jobs such as selling cantaloupes from the back of truck in Phoenix, AZ, and as a mason's assistant in Wisconsin. Back in Cortland in October 1949, he worked for the Cortland Water Board until September 1950, when he entered SUNY Cortland as a freshman and began a new chapter in his life.

A week after graduating from Cortland with a BS in Elementary Education, he married Norma Young Rhodes, his beloved wife of 63 years, whom he first met working on a theatre production at the college. Both taught in Schenectady elementary schools until June 1954, when they moved to Michigan. There, Robert took his MA in English in 1955 and his PhD in English from the University of Michigan in 1964. During their residence in Michigan, Norma taught elementary school in Willow Run and sold World Book Encyclopedias.

Robert returned to SUNY Cortland to teach English from January 1958 to June 1988, retiring as Professor Emeritus of Anglo-Irish Literature. Despite retirement he found he couldn't stay away from the college, sometimes teaching a course, occasionally giving a guest lecture, maintaining the same office – the scene, he said, of many laughs, some tears, and considerable drama. Most days, he read some, wrote a little, drank too much coffee, and usually resisted giving unasked-for advice to his younger colleagues.

During his years at SUNY Cortland, Robert served on many committees, including the English Department's Personnel and Curriculum Committees. He was Coordinator of the Early English Education program, chair of the College's AAUP chapter and the Study Abroad Committee. He took pride in being the chair and founding director of the Honors Program.

Robert's love of teaching – far distant from the high school drop-out – found its focus in Anglo-Irish and Irish-American Literature. He was one of the first generation of the founders of the American Conference for Irish Studies (ACIS), where he served on the Executive Committee for many years and as President in 1986-88. He and Professor Gilbert Cahill taught one of the country's first interdisciplinary courses in Irish Studies, Irish Literature and Nationalism since 1829. He was later Associate Editor of the Irish Literary Supplement. In 1994, the Ancient Order of the Hibernians named him an Honorary Member. ACIS has continued to give an annual endowed award in his name for the best book in Irish literature. Norma shared Robert's love of Ireland and all things Irish, leading them to visit Ireland, where they formed many enduring friendships, 22 times since 1965. Robert's personal collection of over a thousand books of Irish interest recently found a permanent home at Quinnipiac College in Hamden, CT, through Robert's gift to their young Irish Studies Program.

Robert's love of teaching led to most of his scholarly activity, which included co-editing three collections of critical commentary; editing two special volumes of the journal of the Irish-American Cultural Institute, *Eire*; more than 50 presentations to scholarly groups; and two score published articles and book reviews in scholarly journals.

Robert's many honors and awards include the SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching, designation as a SUNY Faculty Exchange Scholar and a SUNY Cortland Distinguished Alumnus. He received the National Educational Association's Distinguished Graduate Award. Additionally, friends and former students endowed the annual Robert Rhodes '53 Scholarship.

Often active in community service, Robert sat on the boards of the Cortland Arts Council, The 1890 House, and Cortland Repertory Theatre. He served 18

years on the Cortland Water Board and was an especially proud and active member of CAPE, a local environmental group that pioneered efforts to protect the Cortland aquifer. He was also a decades-long member of peace groups, most recently the Cortland Community for Peace.

Of course Robert loved reading, but he was also a fan of traditional jazz and the Big Band music and show tunes of the 1940s. Robert had an abiding passion for films, which he found expression for on campus through the Friday Film Series that John Willmer and he established together. But all of this took second place for him to having been blessed with his family.

In addition to Norma, Robert is survived by his daughters, Nancy Keefe Rhodes of Syracuse, NY; Tracy (Bruce) Altieri of Cortland; Alison Rhodes-Devey (Mark Hodge) of Albany, NY; Robin (Michael J) Harris of Williston, VT; and Caitlin Rhodes St. George of Albany, NY. Robert is also survived by his grandchildren, Mairead Harris (Andrew Stein) of Montpelier, VT; Rachel Rhodes-Devey (Peter Crysedale) of Astoria, NY; Alex Aloï of Montpelier, VT; Brian Rhodes-Devey (Joanna Kraft) of Portland, ME; Scott Harris

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(Chanting Wang) of Brattleboro, VT; Laura Harris of Williston, VT; Erin Altieri of Baldwinsville, NY; and Dylan (Salette Grootenboer) Altieri of Mooresville, NC; and by great-grandchildren, Kellen Albrecht of Baldwinsville, NY; and Hunter and Kylie Altieri of Mooresville, NC, as well as by a host of cousins, friends and colleagues. Robert was predeceased by his sister, Jeanne Becker, in 2000.

Robert's family will hold calling hours on Friday, September 30, from 4 – 7 p.m. at Riccardi Funeral Home Chapel, 69 North Main St. Cortland, NY 13045, and a Celebration of Robert's life on Saturday, October 1st, at 1:30 p.m. , at the Port Watson Mini Conference Center. 131 Port Watson St. Cortland, NY 13045

In lieu of flowers, please consider a gift in Robert's name to either the Robert Rhodes Scholarship, c/o Cortland College Foundation, P.O. Box 2000, Cortland, NY 13045, or to St. Mary's School, 61 N. Main St., Cortland, NY 13045.

Arrangements are under the direction of Riccardi Funeral Home, Cortland, N.Y.

www.riccardifuneralhome.com

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Tribute Wall

PF

“ Thanks for the memories

Paul Fardy - May 18, 2018 at 10:54 AM

EK

“ Our deepest condolences, Ed King and George Warren (PFLAG)

EDWARD KING - May 18, 2018 at 10:54 AM

JO

“ Very sad to lose Robert. Over many years he was a kind and thoughtful colleague and friend. I will miss seeing him in Old Main; he was always fun to talk to. Extending all my sympathy to his family.

Jerome O'Callaghan - May 18, 2018 at 10:54 AM

AE

“ Dear Bob. I'm sorry to read that he has left us. Bob has been a steady contributor to Irish studies and my loyal colleague for many decades. ACIS will miss him. I shall miss him. My sympathy to Norma and his family.

Audrey Eyler - May 18, 2018 at 10:54 AM

NB

“ Greatest, most inspiring, professor I ever had.

Nancy Eyles, Barbash - May 18, 2018 at 10:54 AM

LR

“ I am so sorry to hear of Professor Rhodes passing. He opened up another world to me with his course on "Ulysses." He was such a presence on Cortland Campus - a nobility really. And he lived up to that, but also possessed such warmth. It was clear he was doing what he was meant to do, and doing it with passion and poetry and a rich love for it. I'm grateful to have known him and he will certainly continue to inspire many.

Laura (Barbash) Reid - May 18, 2018 at 10:54 AM

CJ

“ Mr. Robert E. Rhodes

Clark Jones - May 18, 2018 at 10:54 AM

PF

“ Dr. Rhodes interviewed and accepted me to Cortland. He was an outstanding and inspiring professor. I was happy to meet him again at a reunion a few years ago and tell him that.

Phyllis Fink - May 18, 2018 at 10:54 AM

EL

“ I was so sad to learn of Robert's passing. Whenever I traveled to Cortland post-graduation, we would meet up for coffee in a downtown restaurant and catch up on life. I first met Robert when he visited one of my undergrad classes to speak about Irish literature. I loved speaking to him about literature and listening to him talk about his life. I will sincerely miss Robert. He was a wonderful human being.

Erica Leibowitz - May 18, 2018 at 10:54 AM