

College mourns loss of Walter Bildstein

IT WAS WITH GREAT SORROW that the St. Jerome's community learned of the death of Professor Walter Bildstein on February 9, 1993. Bildstein was a faculty member and Chair of the Religious Studies Department of the College from 1972 until 1988, when illness forced him to end his formal teaching career.

Bildstein was born in Edmonton and moved to Ontario as a young boy. He attended St. Peter's Seminary in London and became a member of the Congregation of the Resurrection. After earning his Bachelor's degree in Philosophy from Western in 1953, he went on to obtain a Bachelor of Sacred Theology from the Gregorian University in Rome three years later. In 1969, he continued his education, earning a Master's degree in Religious Studies from the University of Windsor, and a Doctorate in Sacred Theology from the Angelicum in Rome.

As a member of the Congregation of the Resurrection, Bildstein served as a priest and a high school teacher in various parishes and schools in Bermuda, Brantford, Burford, and in the Kitchener-Waterloo area. In 1969, he became the founding pastor of the University Catholic Community at St. Jerome's. Bildstein was laicized from his active ministry as a priest in 1974, and married Theresa C. Horrigan, a Religion and Family Life consultant. They resided in Ayr, Ontario.

In the summer of 1974, Bildstein established the "Studies in Christian Living Institute" at St. Jerome's and continued the programme in an off-campus forum in cooperation with ten separate school boards in Western Ontario over the next fourteen years. The Institute was mainly designed to give teachers, as part of their quest for life-long learning, an opportunity for academic upgrading through programmes in Catholic Theology. "I think the sizable contribution Wally made is reflected best in the Christian Living Programme," acknowledges College President Doug Letson. "He provided a package of evening courses on a cyclical basis to students for whom it was not convenient to come to campus – students who lived in places such as Walkerton, Brantford and



Walter Bildstein

Seaforth. Wally was always willing to go the extra mile for the student. He will be remembered as a generous-hearted individual who never said 'no' to a student in need."

With his wife, Theresa, Bildstein established "Christian Living Associates" in 1980, which was designed to further the professional development of Catholic teachers in Ontario. In Ayr, the couple were foster parents and they extended their sense of stewardship and love of the land into a fifty-acre river property which became a favourite spot for school retreats, family gatherings and community activities.

Time is too slow for those who wait, too swift for those who fear, too long for those who grieve, too short for those who rejoice; but for those who love, time is eternity.

To live in hearts we leave behind is not to die.

A long life may not be good enough, but a good life is long enough.

– Walter J. Bildstein

Having suffered from several heart attacks and strokes that finally prevented him from teaching at the College, Bildstein retired to his land "where he tilled, toiled, prayed and planted," notes his wife Theresa. And, on February 9, "he died in his cathedral forest that he loved and cared for so tenderly." ♦

Remembering a gifted teacher and friend

IF YOU WERE A STUDENT at St. Jerome's during the seventies or early eighties, then your memories of the College probably include an image of Walter Bildstein, the soft-spoken Chair of the Religious Studies Department whose ample beard never quite hid his twinkling eyes and gentle smile.

If you were a student in any of Walter's courses, then you undoubtedly remember being challenged to come to terms with difficult issues of faith and doctrine, being given a safe and supportive environment in which you could articulate your stance or pose your questions, being led gently but firmly to see the intricate link between theology, creation, and life itself, and being continuously affirmed in all of your efforts.

If you even once went to Walter's office (for help with work, for advice, or even just for a chat), then you certainly saw an oasis of peacefulness: overflowing pine bookshelves; deep, comfortable chairs; and soft, gentle lighting. What you may not have seen at first glance, though, was a busy and dedicated scholar, an able administrator, and a man committed to the extra effort which he gave to the Christian Living Programme. Walter was all of these, and so very much more; but, when students came to his door, all was set aside and his patient and affirming attention was given entirely to them.

As an undergraduate, I was lucky enough to take a couple of elective courses with Walter. After graduate school, I worked as Walter's teaching and research assistant, and we became good friends. Over the years, my husband and I have shared many wonderful times with Walter and Theresa, his wife, partner, and best friend. Our children loved to join Walter down in his valley – to ride with him on the tractor, to help load the log splitter, or even just to sit and watch the water flow.

After many long battles with illness, Walter died suddenly while working in the valley that he loved so much. With his death, the College lost a valued member, the Ayr Catholic Community lost its founder and a great supporter, Roman Catholics everywhere lost a tireless educator and dedicated theologian, and many, many people – myself included – lost a dear friend.

Ginny Freeman MacOwan (BA '81)