

# A Reunion of Cummings-o-philes



Front L to R: Pat Flynn, (BA '68), Patrick O'Neill (BA '67), Larry Cummings, Judy Stauffert (née Dalrymple-BA '68), Rand Houghton (BA '69), Ron Green (BSC '67), Barb Cowan (kneeling), Mary Perkins (née Kolynko-BA '69), Roger Spalding (BA '66), Gwen Nowak McGrenere (BA '65), Marta Tomins (BA '65).

Back Row L to R: Peter Hinchcliffe, Mike Gurski (BES '74; BA '77), Doug Hilker (BA '66), Virginia Vickers (BA '69), Mary Lou Hiller (BA '66), Roger Fowler (BA '66), Carolyn Pegg (née Lavigne-BA '67), Sr. Barbara Frank (BA '69), Bob Wiljer (BA '66), Gail Young (née MacDonald-BA '66), Bruce Young (BA '66). (Hidden behind Rand Houghton is Barbara Samson-Willis (BA '67)).

It was around ten on the morning of September 17th, 2005. An impressive gathering—including judges, professors, teachers, writers and business people—assembled in the Sr. Leon White Room and greeted each other with evident warmth. The evening before, many had attended the inaugural Laurence A. Cummings Lecture in Cultural History, delivered by Dr. Modris Eksteins on the topic “Art, Fame and the Problem of Authenticity: Vincent van Gogh and Us.”

This morning, however, they were there to bridge the nearly forty years since many of them had seen one another last. Then, they had studied English literature or acted in medieval dramas under the banner of St. Aethelwold's Players. In either case, they came within the compelling orbit of Dr. Larry Cummings and, as was so often the case when he taught them, they were awaiting his arrival.

Cummings taught English at St. Jerome's from 1962 to 1972 before launching the cultural history program at UW's School of Architecture. As a professor he was challenging. As a director he was a perfectionist. The loyalty he commanded was evident in the people he influenced.

The guest of honour arrived at last, the beard whiter, the voice still resonant with southern drawl, the mind still incapable—and intolerant—of flummery.

The stories began—tales of pranks and pratfalls, missed cues, perilous adventures with ladders, impossible assignments and riveting discussions. Pat Flynn remembered being accidentally beamed by a trapdoor in rehearsal, prompting so much laughter that Cummings wanted to keep the shtick in the show. Barb Cowan presented Cummings with a piece of needlepoint detailing the story of Noah that she'd begun nearly forty years before and recently completed. Roger Fowler spoke of being inspired by Cummings' counsel that a “good teacher puts an irritating grain of sand in your mind”, an irritant that spurs questioning and may, in time, produce a pearl of understanding.

Cummings, now retired and living in Texas, was eloquent in his appreciation and visibly pleased to see his former students and colleagues. He did, however, protest that much of what he had heard about his curmudgeonly exactitude and inspiring influence could in no way be confirmed by his own recollections. 🍷

## A Sad Addendum

The conviviality of the inaugural Laurence A. Cummings Lecture in Cultural History and the reunion of graduates from the 1960s was overshadowed by sad news of two subsequent deaths: that of Larry's beloved wife, Jean, on December 18, 2005 of leukemia and, the day before, of **Roger Spalding** (BA '66) from complications arising from brain cancer. It was Roger who first approached St. Jerome's with the idea of establishing and sponsoring an annual lecture honouring his mentor. Roger taught high school English in Toronto until he retired in 1999 and took up a second career as a psychoanalyst with the Institute for the Advancement of Self-Psychology. He was a pioneering member of the AIDS Action Now steering committee in the early days of the AIDS crisis and a regular contributor to *The Body Politic*.



## Robson Re-Connects

Jim Robson first came to St. Jerome's as a student and made lifelong friends in residence. While he couldn't bring himself to leave SJU—Jim has worked for many years as a valued member of Residence and Facilities Operations as Maintenance Lead Hand—his friends moved on. So when Jim organized a big outdoor get-together this past summer at his home in Sebringville, he included a mini-reunion of former SJU students and residents. (Note that Jim's passion for vintage radio is evident in this picture.)

(L to R) **Dave Dawson** (BMATH '93), **Jim Robson** himself, **Pat McAleese** (BA '99), **John Scott** (BA '89), **Mary Scott** (BA '87), **Leslie Duffy** (BA '90), **Paul Smith** (BA '90) and **Neil Duffy** (BMATH '91). Also present were **John Zamora** and **Dan Fasan**.