

New Endowment Invigorates Germanic Studies

Robert Van Dusen Establishes the Van Dusen Scholarship and Fellowship Fund



In 2004 Prof. Robert LaBranche Van Dusen (PhD 1964) made a generous donation to the Department of Germanic Studies to fund student scholarships in German Studies. Prof. Van Dusen, who completed his dissertation on Christian Garve under the direction of Prof. Helmut Rehder, taught German at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, from 1960 to 1999. His own encounter with the German language dated back to the 1950s when he was stationed in Germany with the U.S. Army.

While in Germany, Van Dusen became intrigued with learning the German language, an interest that ultimately motivated him to become a university professor. "After being honorably discharged from the Army, I took advantage of the G.I. Bill to study for two years at the University of Munich," he says. "But people advised me that to be a professor, I should obtain a graduate degree from a university in North America."

The University of Texas was one of seven schools Van Dusen considered, based on the quality of their German departments. He ultimately decided on UT because of its commitment to scholastic excellence and the opportunity to teach while he worked toward his degree. "The professors at Texas were extremely supportive and helpful," he recalls. "I worked hard" - 60 to 70 hours a week - "but I loved what I was doing."

After obtaining both a master's degree and doctorate in Germanic studies, he accepted a job at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, in the early 1960s. He has lived in Canada ever since but continues to feel a strong allegiance to UT Austin. Having already provided several gifts to support the Department of Germanic Studies, he recently increased his investment substantially with an appreciated insurance policy worth \$250,000 to endow the Van Dusen Scholarship and Fellowship Fund.

The endowment, which supports both undergraduate and graduate students, has energized the department, according to Professor Kit Belgum. "We are thrilled about Professor Van Dusen's generous gift to Germanic Studies. His scholarships have already

opened up new opportunities, such as internships and study abroad, for students of German."

Heidi Gensler, a junior with a double major in biomedical engineering and German, is a Van Dusen Scholar currently studying in Hamburg, Germany. "I am so grateful to Dr. Van Dusen for providing me with the financial support for my study abroad," she says. "I'm interacting with students from all over the world and gaining experience in both fields."

---By Marisa Rainsberger

(This article first appeared in a slightly different form in the Winter '06 edition of *Life and Letters*, a publication of the College of Liberal Arts.)

Robert LaBranche Van Dusen

[Obituary provided by the family]

Robert LaBranche Van Dusen of Burlington, Ontario, and formerly of Southampton, Long Island, and Hamilton, Ontario, was born May 5, 1929, in New York City, New York to William Haigh Van Dusen and Virginia LaBranche Van Dusen (Lake). He died peacefully, with his sister by his side, in the Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital in Burlington, Ontario on February 25, 2007, after a sudden and brief illness.

A scholar at heart, Bob's thirst for knowledge was evidenced by his research on the 18th century; his writings included two books and many journal articles. He loved teaching and was very well liked by his students who enjoyed his classes. A more humble, benevolent gentleman *would be* hard to find. His amiability, his gentle unassuming nature and especially his dry wit will be greatly missed by all who knew and loved him. A man of unfailing integrity and reliability, his dedication to excellence in his profession, loyalty to his family and friends, and his willingness to volunteer in his community are his legacy.

Bob attended the Browning School in New York City followed by graduation from Deerfield Academy in Deerfield, Massachusetts, in 1947 and from Harvard College in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1951. He then joined the US Army and served in counterintelligence from 1951-1954, the first two years of which were spent in Germany where he gained a love for the German people and their language. At the conclusion of his service in the Army, he prepared himself for a career in university teaching and research by studying German language and literature in Munich, Germany, from 1954-1956 and then at the University of Texas from 1956-1960, culminating in a Ph.D. in 1964. He joined the faculty at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, in 1960. He was a Lecturer from 1960 to 1963, an Assistant Professor from 1963-

1968 and an Associate Professor from 1968 until his retirement from the Department of German in 1989. Not yet ready to give up continued contact with students, he continued to teach part-time until 1994.

He was a member of the Holland Society of New York, the Harvard Clubs of New York City and Toronto, the Conservative Party of Canada, and of many other professional and educational organizations. He was an active volunteer having served in various capacities for the Bruce Trail Association, the Burlington Aldershot Lions Club, and the Aldershot Community Council. He was also a supporter of many charities including the Nature Conservancy, the Peconic Land Trust of Southampton, New York, the Hamilton YMCA, the Hamilton Community Foundation; and he was a benefactor of various scholarships and endowments at McMaster University, the University of Texas, Deerfield Academy and the Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital.

Bob was preceded in death by his father William Haigh Van Dusen and his mother Virginia Lake, by his step-mother Eleanor Kimball Van Dusen, by his stepfather Henri Lake and his half-sister Harriet Van Dusen Spitzer of Wilson, Wyoming. Surviving him are his other half-sisters, Judith Van Dusen Whittlesey (Willis) of Salt Lake City, Utah, Margaret Van Dusen Bullard of Winnisquam, New Hampshire, and Katryna Van Dusen Fredregill (Robert) of Pueblo, Colorado, brother-in-law Norton Spitzer of Wilson, Wyoming, his aunt Miss Elizabeth La Branche of Washington, D.C., and by nieces, nephews, cousins and many, many friends. A memorial service in the Hamilton, Ontario area will be planned for the Spring. Burial will be in the Van Dusen family plot at Woodlawn Cemetery in New York City.

The family wishes to express special thanks to the nursing staff on 4East of the Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital for their caring attention during Bob's last days.

If desired, contributions in Bob's memory may be made to any of the following: the Bruce Trail Association (the Niagara Escarpment Fund); the Van Dusen Conservation Fund at McMaster University; the Nature Conservancy (the South Fork Shelter Island Chapter); the Van Dusen Scholarship and Fellowship Fund (at the University of Texas in Austin); the Joseph Brant Memorial Hospital,
