



Robert "Bob" Willard Paynter

September 22, 1949 - April 30, 2023

Robert "Bob" Willard Paynter of Northampton died on April 30, 2023, after a long illness. He was born on September 22, 1949, in Chester, PA to Marjorie McDowell and Robert Charles Paynter. He took joy in being an equinox baby his whole life. He grew up playing sports, reading history and fiction, and having a good time with his brothers Rick and Dave, cousin Babs, and a large collection of friends.

Bob had a curious spirit and thrived on days full of learning and exploration. Books took him around the world and through time, from lefty political magazines, to dense intellectual histories, to imaginary worlds among the stars. The woods and mountains of New England brought adventures in all seasons on foot, bicycle and xc skis. Jazz music and his trumpet were the soundtrack of every journey. And chance encounters with strangers were an opportunity to make new friends, hear new perspectives and learn something fascinating. Few subjects fell outside his interest, and his conversations rambled as freely as he did, to the occasional distraction of his loving family.

A lifelong educator, Bob was passionate and generous in sharing what he knew. Bob taught in the anthropology departments at Queens College (1978-1981) and at UMass - Amherst (1981-2015) where he was also a committed union member and officer. He was proud of UMass's role as a public university serving the people of the Commonwealth. However, teaching was

not confined to classrooms for Bob. It was something that happened on little league diamonds, waiting in line at the farmers market, covered in dirt at a dig site, and in everyday interactions with friends, family, and strangers.

Mostly, Bob asked questions. As a young man he questioned the Vietnam War and continued to do so whenever the country moved towards war. Throughout his life he questioned (and occasionally railed against) the roots of injustice and inequality in our society. And he questioned what had shaped the world we know, and how we might build a better one. He became an anthropologist and a teacher in part to answer his own questions, but also because he saw them as paths towards building a more just and kind world. His work at the W.E.B Du Bois homesite in Great Barrington, Historic Deerfield, and in making the University more responsible to the indigenous people of the region, brought him pride and a wide network of friends and colleagues that he delighted in.

For us, he was a warm husband, father, and brother who was part of building a loving home. He is survived by his wife, Linda Morley, son, Braden Paynter, brothers Richard, David, and Manuel (of his chosen Barcelona family), near-sister Barbara, and a far-flung network of other cousins, nieces, nephews, in-laws, friends, colleagues, and graduate students.

A memorial service will be held in the coming months. In the interim, condolences may be sent directly to the family or by visiting www.DROZDALFUNERALHOME.com. To honor Bob, please read something new, stand up for someone in trouble or make donations to the Du Bois Freedom Center in Great Barrington (www.duboisfreedomcenter.org).

Tribute Wall

JH

“ I just found out about Bob's passing and my deepest condolences to family and friends. He was one of the people at UMass whom I always felt was a kindred spirit. His commitment to fairness, his compassion, and his integrity showed what a truly great human being can be. We served on many committees together over the years and I always knew that his heart and mind were dedicated to making the world a better place. He will be deeply missed, and I feel honored to have been able to call him friend.

Jarice Hanson - August 04, 2023 at 09:58 AM

DB

“ My condolences to all the family. I was saddened to hear of Bob's passing. He was generous with both his time and knowledge when I was in the US for my PhD way back in the early 2000s. We stayed in touch and were able to meet up at conferences in Dublin and Leicester. We not only chatted about our research but our beloved teams, the Boston Red Sox and Leeds United! Bob made me a Red Sox fan and I still wear the cap he gave me. A truly great scholar, a lovely man, and a good friend. Richard Benjamin (aka Benny).

Dr Richard Benjamin - May 16, 2023 at 05:03 PM



“ Emerald Garden Basket was purchased for the family of Robert "Bob" Willard Paynter.



May 13, 2023 at 11:59 AM



“ [Memorial Trees](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was purchased for the family of Robert "Bob" Willard Paynter.

May 13, 2023 at 11:59 AM



“ I was so sorry to see this. I remember Bob fondly from my time as a graduate student, and once TA'ing for him, back in early 80s. My sincere condolences. -- Dick Wagner

Dick Wagner - May 09, 2023 at 04:08 PM



“ I am forever grateful that Bob was the generous and considerate “outside” member of my Sociology dissertation committee back in 1988. We connected again in more recent years through events in support of the Du Bois Homestead and the Clinton Church Restoration/Du Bois Freedom Center in Great Barrington, and other random encounters at local area arts venues and UMass events. It was always such a pleasure to see and chat with him, and he was always so kind and welcoming. He seemed so brave in his health struggles in recent years. What a gift Bob was to all of us. Our heartfelt condolences to his family and close friends.
- Linda L. Marston, PhD and Dennis Bromery

Linda Marston - May 09, 2023 at 03:23 PM

DK

“ *What I remember most about Bob was the absolute joy with which he approached life. Even in the most contentious issues Bob always seemed to find something useful and interesting. His laugh was especially infectious. He was clearly the smartest amongst us early-70s graduate cohort, but he was humble with his knowledge, generous with his assistance, and collegial to a fault. He will certainly be missed by so many. David Kideckel*

David Kideckel - May 09, 2023 at 01:42 PM

KM

“ *Linda, Braydon, I'm so sorry about Bob and his long illness. It may have been a gift for him to go, not knowing the nature of his illness, but, you are the ones left with the loss. No matter how long you've "expected" this ending, that you've been "ready", I think you never really are prepared for it. I know this must be complicated for you, but know that I'm thinking of you and my arms are hugging you, even though you probably wouldn't like that... Kathleen McGovern*

Kathleen McGovern - May 09, 2023 at 11:41 AM

AR

“ *On behalf of the Administration, Faculty and Staff of Queens College, we would like to extend our heartfelt condolences to the family of Robert W. Paynter.*

May he Rest in Peace,

Anna Rossini - May 08, 2023 at 06:46 PM

DP

“ I am so sorry to hear about Bob’s passing. We always refer to him as Biba’s Bob, and I like to think that they are together again. What I remember most about him is that he was always so kind. What a loss.

Doryne Pederzani-Dinneen - May 06, 2023 at 08:00 AM

BW

“ So sorry to hear of Bob's passing. He served for many years on the Editorial Board of the UMass Press and always contributed very thoughtfully and helpfully to the discussion of each book manuscript under review. We also had many good conversations about his work at the Du Bois homestead. I admired his commitment to his students and his positive, generous spirit. My heart goes out to his family in this sad time.

Bruce Wilcox - May 05, 2023 at 03:22 PM

PF

“ Hi Linda: Kathleen called about Bob, so sorry! Been a long time but still lots of fond memories of our times together! Peter Friedland, p_friedland@yahoo.com

peter friedland - May 05, 2023 at 12:48 PM

SG

“ I knew Bob from 1971 when we began graduate education at UMASS. We shared many many hours discussing and arguing anthropological theory but also watching NHL hockey (my Rangers vs his Flyers) and our favorite TV show “Streets of San Francisco”. One story that stands out is when we co-wrote a paper to present at the SAA meetings on simulating and measuring artifact scatters. To do this we took over all the teletype-computers at UMASS to run simultaneous simulations. We tore off the yellow sheets with the results on the way to he train to DC. After presenting our paper, we literally ran to the Government Printing Office to get a first day edition of the Watergate Report.
I want to share my condolences to Linda.
Bob was a good colleague and dear friend and I will miss him.

STANTON W GREEN - May 04, 2023 at 02:04 PM