

William Thomas Jolly '52
Professor Emeritus of Classics

April 8, 1929-November 4, 2007

Tom Jolly, '52 professor of Classics at Rhodes from 1965-2004, died Sunday, November 4. He was 78. He had been in poor health for several years, the result of a stroke he suffered in 1997. Several Rhodes faculty, alumni and other friends and neighbors took loving care of him.

A memorial service will beheld this Saturday, November 10, at 10:00 a.m. at St. Luke's United Methodist Church, 480 S. Highland.

Prof. Jolly majored in Classics at Rhodes and earned his master's degree at the University of Mississippi and Ph.D. at Tulane University.

The recipient of the 1991 Clarence Day Award for Outstanding Teaching, Prof. Jolly, an avid collector of recordings of classical music, donated his entire record collection to the college in 1993. It was said at the time that the Jolly Recorded Music Collection was perhaps the largest compilation of complete operas in Memphis.

The following is a profile of Prof. Jolly that was published in the spring 2004 issue of Rhodes magazine:

Tom Jolly says it was an accident that he majored in Greek and Latin, and that he never had to apply for a job in his life. He laughs when he says it, but what really happened over the years is that his major, along with deans, colleges and students simply found *him*, and in him, a scholar, teacher and lifelong friend.

Jolly, who had studied Latin at Webb School in Bell Buckle, TN, began college at Vanderbilt and transferred to Rhodes second semester of his freshman year. He saw no reason to take more Latin at Rhodes, but it fit his schedule. His professors encouraged him to take more Latin and pick up Greek on the way. By the time he graduated he had enough hours for a double major—one in each language, though he read for honors in Latin only.

Graduate school at Johns Hopkins lasted only a semester when Jolly, a member of the Naval Reserve, was called to active duty. He served as a diesel mechanic for two years and afterward, even considered working on Mississippi River towboats.

With the G.I. Bill he earned his master's degree at Ole Miss. He studied for his Ph.D. at Michigan and completed it at Tulane. While at Michigan he applied for a teaching job at Sewanee to see if that was indeed what he wanted to do. At the same time, along came an unsolicited offer from Millsaps, which he accepted. Another offer came in 1965, this time from Rhodes, where he taught till 1994.

He delights in his students who now teach classics at prep school and university level, the one who became a physician and then chucked it all to pursue a Ph.D. in classics, and another who taught the requisite Greek to fellow seminarians at Princeton as a first-year student there. Years

later the precocious Princetonian instructed his daughter, who was stranded overnight in Memphis, to call Tom Jolly for help, which he was happy to give.

A classic story from the classics professor involves a student who owned a 1955 Chevrolet named Agonia, from the Greek word for “contest.” Jolly, who had gone to the student’s rescue many times, gave Agonia a tune-up. The car worked fine till after graduation. Shortly afterward, a midnight phone call from Agonia’s owner, now stalled outside of Little Rock, informed Jolly that Agonia had died. Jolly drove to Little Rock and rescued him once more. The student took Agonia’s hood ornament with him. Today, when that alumnus talks to prospective Rhodes students, he shows the ornament and tells the story of the kind of place Rhodes *really* is.

Martha Hunter Shepard
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