

DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

**REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
JOSEPH F. MALOF**

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Joseph F. Malof, professor emeritus, English, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.



Hillary Hart, Secretary
General Faculty and Faculty Council

**IN MEMORIAM
JOSEPH F. MALOF**

Professor Emeritus Joseph Fetler Malof was a dear colleague, as Acting Chair Martin Kervorkian called him in informing the English department that Joe had died January 7, 2015. In response to the University's loss, Professor Kurt Heinzelman concluded his representative warm praise for Joe, "I think I loved the guy." Donette Moss, respected former Plan II administrator, wrote that Malof was not only a great teacher, he was an exceptional human being. Former students gave similar cordial testimony. Throughout his career, he displayed an uncommon modesty that gave little hint of the well-deserved admiration and affection he inspired in others.

Behind the scholar and teacher with the matchless ear for poetic rhythm and sound stood his early childhood experience playing percussion in the traveling family band. It was a revelation that this self-effacing man had the dramatic family history captured on the video he created after he retired (Fetler "Family Band," available on YouTube). It centers engrossingly on his evangelical Christian family using its musical and other talents to survive in Russia, Latvia, and Western Europe; immigrating to the U.S. months before World War II began; and barely avoiding deportation.

Joe was born the youngest of thirteen children on May 26, 1934, in Riga, Latvia, to William and Barbara Fetler (later changed to Malof) and raised in several European countries and Evanston, Illinois. He became a U.S. citizen in 1947 and earned a B.A. (1956) at Kenyon College while on a scholarship and a Ph.D. (1962) at UCLA. Appointed an instructor by the university in 1961, he was promoted to full professor in 1973 and retired in 2002. After the death of his wife Dannie, the poet D. Kildare, he edited a volume of her poetry, *Hungry Ghosts* (2006).

Characteristically, in collecting her work and making the family history video, he focused his post-retirement scholarly and creative talents on others.

Joe's specialty was modern American poetry, though he taught a variety of subjects. His book, *A Manual of English Meters* (1974; re-printed 1978), the review by *Choice* said, "supersedes all the partial treatments available. . . . Indispensable." An earlier landmark, "The Native Rhythm of English Meters" (1964), drew attention from critical luminary

Kenneth Burke, whose letter to Malof about metrical issues sought confirmation of Burke's own understanding—heady recognition for a young untenured professor. Craig La Dière, Harvard professor of comparative literature, called this article “the best account in existence of the subject” and was impressed by its generous crediting of previous scholarship. Other notable critics—Northrop Frye, Monroe Beardsley, and Paul Fussell—recognized the high merit of Malof's publications as well.

It was as a teacher that Joe's reputation flourished most in the department, the University, and the profession. In a large department, Joe stood out for his consistent excellence. In 1980, a bonus raise from the dean recognized Malof as one of a handful in the college achieving the greatest sustained superiority in undergraduate teaching.

At this point, Joe had already won the national Harbison Award for Gifted Teaching (Danforth Foundation, 1970); a nomination by the University for Outstanding Educator of America (1974-75); and the Bromberg (1969) and the President's Associates (1979-80) Teaching Excellence awards at the college and University levels. Joe would then win an Association of Graduate Students in English citation (1981, 1982); the Liberal Arts Award for Outstanding Classroom Performance (1988-89); and the Chad Oliver Plan II Teaching Award (1996). He also became a Plan II Parlin Fellow that year.

Malof drew out his students' best work not only by his comments on their papers but by his vivid example of preparation in every class meeting. Professor Betty Sue Flowers, formerly a student in his modern poetry course, described Malof's approach:

He taught close attention to the obvious. Everyone can see it. No one is dumb, but he pretends to be. It's very funny. He starts asking questions about the obvious. Then the poem begins to reveal itself, and you begin to look at the world with the same 'dumb' wonder. And only real, childlike questions will expose the depths. Not philosophical answers--experiences of wonder. Even the basics of meter will yield worlds. In conclusion, he'd laugh at his seriousness. That erased an impediment to the spirit of play, but it didn't erase our experience of the poem.” Flowers, herself a noted teacher, later offered the same course, and they often discussed it: “But he was always my teacher.

He was a teacher to many colleagues informally, for example by leading demonstration discussions of poems. Joe's collegial influence on classroom instruction became a continuing force that amplifies the four decades of his more direct lasting impact on his students' lives. True to his deep commitment to teaching, Malof was often called upon for related committee work at the undergraduate and graduate levels. For example, he chaired committees on several English courses and in designing new courses or variants. In appraising teaching, he was active practically and as the drafter of procedures for the department and the college. He chaired and served on such University committees as Faculty Grievance, University Research Institute, Interscholastic League, and Faculty Publications. His judging of journal submissions for *Texas Studies* for many years exemplifies his standout contributions to a variety of evaluations—of professional manuscripts and research proposals, writing for student contests, and applications to Plan II and graduate study.

He gave especially dedicated service to departmental governance—crucially on the Executive Committee. He coordinated promotions in three annual stints, leading the

department chair, Joseph Moldenhauer, to call him a “Gibraltar.” Several times he served on the college committee for promotion and tenure. His election as departmental ombudsman and as overseer of elections manifested the special confidence his colleagues had in him. For the college (humanities, then liberal arts) and outside it, he performed numerous similar services. Perhaps his most durable contributions were in the area of departmental and college governance; he led a revision of the departmental constitution and participated in the Governance Committee, which he chaired in the early eighties and again in 2001-2002. If any of his colleagues surpassed Joe’s service effort, fairness, generosity, and unflagging good will and modesty, we are unaware of it.

In this and every other way, we were enriched by having him as a colleague.

Distributed to the dean of College of Liberal Arts on May 27, 2016, and posted under “Memorial Resolutions” at <https://wikis.utexas.edu/display/facultycouncil/Wiki+Home>.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Warwick Wadlington (chair), Joseph Moldenhauer, and Charles Rossman.