DOCUMENTS OF THE GENERAL FACULTY

REPORT OF THE MEMORIAL RESOLUTION COMMITTEE FOR
ROBERT BRODY

The special committee of the General Faculty to prepare a memorial resolution for Robert Brody, professor emeritus, Spanish and Portuguese, has filed with the secretary of the General Faculty the following report.

Sue Alexander Greninger, Secretary
General Faculty and Faculty Council

IN MEMORIAM
ROBERT BRODY

Robert Brody, professor emeritus at The University of Texas at Austin and former chair of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, passed away on February 21, 2012, after a long illness. A distinguished scholar of twentieth-century Spanish American literature, Professor Brody will be remembered as a dedicated professional who treated students and colleagues alike with appreciation and respect and who demonstrated a vibrant joy for life that continued well into his retirement.

Professor Brody grew up in New Jersey and attended the Peddie and Hun Schools as a boy. He showed an affinity for languages from an early age. He studied briefly at Middlebury College and then joined the Army. Following his military service, he enrolled at Rutgers University where he received his B.A. degree. He completed an M.A. at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana and received his Ph.D. from Harvard University where he worked with the highly respected Latin Americanist scholar Enrique Anderson Imbert. The subject of his doctoral dissertation was the complex novel Rayuela by the Argentine writer Julio Cortázar. In a note to the authors of this memorial resolution, his longtime friend and colleague, Lee Fontanella, remembered him as “a puzzle-solver, seeking to find solutions for situations whose resolution might at first glance appear hidden. Perhaps this was why he chose to focus on a lengthy novel of complicated structure and theme as the culmination of his graduate work.”


Professor Brody was an effective and inspirational teacher. Always generous with his time, he was highly regarded by both graduate and undergraduate students for his fairness and common sense as an advisor as well as for his erudition as an instructor. During his tenure at UT Austin, he received several teaching awards, including the Outstanding Teacher Award from the College of Humanities Council, the College of Liberal Arts Teaching Excellence Award, and an honorable mention for the Harry H. Ransom Award for Teaching Excellence in the College of Humanities. His students over the years praised him for his enthusiasm and love of his academic field, his generosity with his time, his willingness to help them overcome challenges and
difficulties, and his patience and understanding. He was equally at home teaching first- and second-year language classes, advanced undergraduate courses, courses in translation, and graduate classes. Several students described him as the best language instructor they had studied with at UT Austin.

As a colleague, Professor Brody was particularly known as a wise and supportive mentor of junior faculty, always ready with sound advice and genuinely helpful encouragement. He was collegial in all senses of the word, consummately fair-minded, ethical, and respectful. He was an exemplary department leader, serving as chair from 1987 until 1991, during a time in which the department was one of the most highly ranked in the nation. Professor Brody believed that an academic department could thrive when students and faculty were nurtured, supported, and respected for their unique contributions and potential so they could find the best in themselves. As Lee Fontanella recalls,

He had a keen sense of how social ethics combines with academics, and this made him a perfect colleague. This marriage of high values nurtured his directorship of the department, and it had been a characteristic of his performance long prior to his assuming the chairmanship. He was a master expositor of his beliefs, an orator almost, and this skill carried over directly into his love of acting, a calling that was fulfilled during the last fifteen years of his life, both in film and on stage. Yet, as if in spite of his acting ability, I saw the most consistent genuineness in Bob: an unfailing willingness and ability to follow through with his strongest convictions, and the courage to speak his mind.

Professor Brody possessed a warm, golden, and resonant voice that served him not only in the classroom, but also in a second career as an actor on the local stage and on the screen. He worked frequently as a voiceover artist and, in the early days of the Texas Lottery, his was the voice that read the winning ticket numbers every Saturday night. After his retirement from UT Austin in 1997, he acted with many local theatrical companies, performing leading roles in Fiddler on the Roof at the Paramount Theatre and in numerous other community theatre productions. That he would embark on a second career in theatre seems especially appropriate since he and his wife Lynne met while working together in a university production of The Taming of the Shrew at Rutgers. He was an extra in the movie The Newton Boys and played the leading role in Life is Like a Glass of Tea, which he filmed in Denmark during the last year of his life. Of this final period of life, his friend and colleague Sharon Foerster says,

I smile to know that his beautiful voice and his love of acting afforded him opportunities that gave him so much joy. The fact that he considered the movie he made in Denmark during his last year to be one of the highlights of his life inspires us to keep following our dreams and to live life to the fullest.

Professor Brody always embraced living, even during his long battle with cancer. His essential integrity and optimism remained cornerstones of his life throughout his illness, and his unfailing energy propelled him to pursue and accomplish his most rewarding goals, even during his final year. If the humanities ultimately teach us about what it means to be human, Professor Brody was an exemplary humanist, still continuing to enrich his own life and the lives of others years after leaving the classroom.

This memorial resolution was prepared by a special committee consisting of Professors Cory A. Reed (chair), Michael Harney, and Madeline Sutherland-Meier.

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