



### **ROBERT EMMETT FINNEGAN**

Robert Emmett Finnegan, soldier and scholar, irrepressible wit and Professor of English at the University of Manitoba, died on December 23, 2019, at St. Boniface Hospital, in the loving company of his wife Joan and his two daughters, Joan Bowker (Rod) and Kathleen Leipsic (Greg).

He is survived by seven grandchildren: Robert (Alana), Kirsten, Alex and Erica Bueckert; Brendan, Jeremy and Emma Leipsic; and three great-grandchildren, Jackson and Ella Bueckert and Ainsely Dyck.

He was predeceased by his father Robert and mother Anne Finnegan of Jersey City, where Rob was born September 17, 1941.

He earned a BA in English (1962) at St. Peter's College in Jersey City and married his high-school sweetheart Joan (née Sears), after receiving his MA in English from Notre Dame University in 1963. Rob and Joan lived in South Bend where he began work at Notre Dame on his PhD in English, while teaching courses at Indiana University as well as Notre Dame, and serving as an Army Reservist (1963 to 1969). After he received his PhD in February 1969, he was deployed to Vietnam as a Captain in the U.S. Army, where he served in the Phoenix Program as a paratrooper in military intelligence, often dropping behind enemy lines for weeks at a time with his South Vietnamese brothers. Receiving the Bronze Star and Commendation Medal for meritorious service, he left the "green world" to drive with a young family across a snow-swept continent to take up a post at the University of Manitoba in January 1971, where he taught Old and Middle English for 45 years, published a critical edition of *The Old English Christ and Satan* (1977), and produced two dozen scholarly articles on topics ranging from the Junius Manuscript to Chaucer to Medieval Drama to Renaissance poetry to Ernest Hemingway. As a life member of Clare Hall, Cambridge University, he had access to many of the most important manuscripts of the Middle Ages and found an illuminating way to bring illuminated manuscripts into scholarly discussions of postmodernism. While he demanded as much of his students as he did of himself, he was revered by students and colleagues alike. He was a "gentle and benevolent mentor" to all who caught his infectious enthusiasm and shared his love of learning, and a stern figure of conscience to those who failed to realize his unfailing hopes for them. Even then, one colleague writes, "his students adored him," recalling one who wept at his retirement because she could not take another class with him. His efforts as a "raucous," "humorous," and wildly effective teacher brought him many distinctions, including a Certificate of Teaching Excellence from the Students' Union, the Dr. and Mrs. H.H. Saunderson Award for Outstanding Teaching in the University, and the Graduate Students' Association Award for Excellence in Graduate Teaching, with grateful support from the 16 MA students whose thesis

work he had meticulously directed. In every respect, he was worthy of the compliment Chaucer paid to his clerk in *The Canterbury Tales*: "And gladly wolde he lerne, and gladly teche." For all his endless labours, he remained a devotee of good living: frequent jaunts around the Mediterranean; skippering of his sailboat the *Navigamus* from the South to the North basin of Lake Winnipeg; vintage wines; well-crafted automobiles (particularly Jaguars), and huge dogs (not least a St. Bernard named Beowulf). He was a staunch supporter of the Blue Bombers Football Club, an enabler of stimulating conversation and a creator of true conviviality. Indeed, his talent for friendship was boundless. No one who heard his roar of laughter ever failed to be caught up in it. As his former landlord in France responded to news of his death: "Robert, what a wonderful man, such stuff as dreams are made on, with intelligence, humour and an appetite for living rarely surpassed. Now his little life is rounded with a sleep." We shall not see his like again.

The family is grateful to the doctors and staff of the St. Boniface Hospital Cardiac Centre Asper Insitute whose compassionate care over the last three months is deeply appreciated.

A Funeral Mass will be held on January 3, 2020 at 1:00 p.m., at St. Vital Catholic Church, 1629 Pembina Hwy.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the St. Boniface Hospital; Cardiac Care.