

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

WILLIAM J. IVERSON

(1911 - 1994)

William J. Iverson, Professor Emeritus of Education at Stanford, died on February 21, 1994, from complications of Parkinson's disease. He was 82.

After receiving his doctorate from Stanford in 1948, having combined graduate study with service as an Instructor, he was promoted to Assistant Professor. By 1959 he had achieved the rank of Professor. He served as Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in the School of Education with I. James Quillen, whose administration Iverson aided especially during the final period of Dean Quillen's life when he was increasingly overtaken by Lou Gehrig's disease. Bill served again in the same post with Dean Arthur Coladarci, from 1971 until becoming emeritus in 1977. In his retirement, he and Adelaide, his wife of 51 years, devoted themselves to the life of the university, with frequent attendance at campus concerts, plays, and sporting events.

Iverson was born in 1911 in Buffalo, New York, the son of a steel worker. His father's background was Norwegian, his mother's English, and Bill later claimed that the motto in the family kitchen was "when in doubt, boil it." He attended South Park High School, which offered a classical curriculum to its mostly working-class students, enabling Bill to study Latin, German, and Greek. Taking the role of Scrooge in "A Christmas Carol" and of Malvolio in "Twelfth Night" sparked his love of drama, a love reflected in his later writings and teaching.

Initially he enrolled at the University of Buffalo, but the economic depression forced him to drop out. What he termed his "mature speaking voice" enabled him to find work at Buffalo radio stations as a news analyst and producer, and he performed in early broadcasts of "The Lone Ranger" and "The Green Hornet."

He resumed college work at the University of Michigan, earning an A.B. in English in 1937. During the ensuing four years he taught in public schools in Michigan.

Memorial Resolution, William J. Iverson – continued...

After World War II, Bill was one of many veterans who came to Stanford for graduate study. His interests included comparative literature, English, and education. He had an intense concern about the need to improve teaching in American high schools. He and Adelaide lived in Stanford Village in Menlo Park, as did many of their married peers. This was emergency student housing, substandard even then, at a former military base that is now the site of SRI. Strong friendships emerged among the married students who toughed it out at the Village. Some of the ablest of Stanford graduate students then stayed on at the university in faculty posts, and the friendship bonds forged at the Village held during their years of faculty service and into retirement. The Iversons became part of an especially cohesive and long lasting cohort that also included Marvin and Leah Chodorow, Bob and Nancy Hofstadter -- with whom they shared a love of Dixieland and Chicago jazz, Elliott and Rhoda Levinthal, and Leonard and Fran Schiff. All remained fast friends with Edith M. Dowley, the Stanford faculty member who was their children's teacher at Stanford Village Nursery School.

Professor Iverson's work centered on the teaching of English and literature to children in elementary school and high school. He believed that the reason people, including children, read the printed page is to derive meaning. This belief led to reservations about some enthusiastic emphases on phonics in the teaching of reading. Reading, he said, is not a ballet of the eyes. Iverson concentrated on educating Stanford students who planned to be teachers, integrating literature and linguistics in their instruction. He was a leader in developing Stanford's Secondary Teacher Education Program (STEP).

With Jean D. Grambs, he published *Modern Methods in Secondary Education* in 1952, a textbook for future high school teachers. His 1958 book on *Research in the Three R's* was co-authored with C.W. Hunnicutt. With his former graduate student Sam Sebesta he wrote *Literature for Thursday's Child*, published in 1975. Iverson served for twelve years as senior editor for the Singer/Random House Literature Series, and a major publishing project was his monumental work on *Prose and Poetry*, which Sebesta says "changed reading instruction forever to include good taste, good literature, and the literary experience."

He was honored as Distinguished Lecturer for the National Council for the Teachers of English in 1970-1971. In the following three years he was a Director of the International Reading Association. He served as consultant to California State School Superintendent Wilson Riles' Commission on Language Arts.

Bill Iverson was one of those model professors who leave the rest of us wondering admiringly how he managed to do it all. He was accessible in his office, and served devotedly year after year as an academic advisor to undergraduates. When a student enrolled for directed reading or a tutorial with

Memorial Resolution, William J. Iverson – continued...

him, he did the reading along with the students. He gave challenging, absorbing, and up-to-date classroom lectures, and his delivery was masterful.

Enthusiastically he pressed books from his own collection into the hands of students who might want to learn from them. He had a light touch. When a teacher enrolled in his class asked what to do about a child who refused to participate in her classroom but instead sat in the back of the room reading an unabridged dictionary, Iverson replied promptly, "Leave him there and bring him food."

Because of his special involvement with literature intended for children, he owned a large collection of children's books, and characteristically he was very free with them. He often lent copies to teachers to use in their classes and forgot to get them back. His former graduate student Sam Sebesta said, "Bill lived beside a river of literature, loving the view and sharing it, as he was never acquisitive."

The essential academic, Bill was modest, gentle, and self-effacing, always directing attention away from himself to the topic at hand. He was unfailingly loyal to the university that nurtured him, and felt he had been privileged to teach at Stanford during her Golden Age. The disruptions and violence that the Vietnam War brought to our campus were painful to him, especially when civility in academic discourse was lost. His own courtesy and decency remained intact.

In addition to Adelaide, Bill is survived by their three sons -- Peter, David, and Paul -- as well as their wives and children.

Michael Kirst, Chair
Marvin Chodorow
Alberta Siegel