



William A. Sessions

August 4, 1928 - August 12, 2016

The Sessions family regrets to announce the passing of William A. Sessions of Atlanta, Professor Emeritus of English Literature at Georgia State University, scholar of English Renaissance Literature and of Southern Catholic author Flannery O'Connor, and a poet and playwright

Dr. Sessions was born in Conway, South Carolina, in 1928, and graduated from the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill in 1948. While there he developed a life-long interest in drama and literature and his achievements at that time included founding the Carolina Review of Literature. At Chapel Hill, he also joined the Southern Conference on Human Welfare, an early civil rights organization based in the South, to act against the racism he believed was poisoning the South - he would later assist in desegregating the DeKalb County public school system by serving as the PTA president of the first desegregated school.

Following his graduation, he moved to New York where he earned his MA in English Literature from Columbia University. After this, he lived in 1950s Greenwich Village and was a member the Metropolitan Opera's Corps de Ballet. While there, he became a Catholic and decided to pursue an academic career as a vocation.

He taught at West Georgia College and worked at the Archdiocese of Atlanta newspaper where he met and cultivated a friendships with Flannery O'Connor. During this period, he also developed friendships with other Southern writers such as Walker Percy.

While there, he received a Fulbright Scholarship to study philosophy at Freiburg University, Germany, with Martin Heidegger. While in Europe, he met his wife of 54 years, Jenny, in Athens, Greece.

After completing his PhD studies at Columbia, he returned South and joined the English faculty of Georgia State University in Atlanta, GA, in 1966 where he taught English literature for over 30 years and published several books including *The Liberating Form*, *Francis Bacon Revisited*, *Spencer's Georgics*, and his most important academic work on the development of the poetic sonnet by Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey and Howard's influence on William Shakespeare. He also wrote the introduction to the Prayer Journal of Flannery O'Connor - a work that he discovered while sifting through the O'Connor archives while researching his final project. He had finished a larger biographical work on Flannery O'Connor that will be published posthumously. He was a noted Atlanta playwright and won the South Eastern Theater Conference's Best New Playwright award (1988) his play entitled *A Shattering of Glass* about the violence of racism. He also won Nikos Kazantzakis Medal (Greece) for literature for his work on Edmund Spenser.

He is survived by his sons Andrew and Eric, and his grandson Nicholas who brought him much joy and happiness.

He will be buried in Conway, SC, with his wife of blessed memory. A memorial service will be held in Atlanta, GA, at a later date.

In lieu of flowers, please send donations to the Monastery of the Holy Spirit, Conyers, GA. (<<http://www.trappist.net/>>)

Please sign an online guestbook at www.goldfinchfuneralhome.com

Previous Events

Graveside Service

AUG **16**. 11:00 AM (ET)

Lakeside Cemetery
401 Lakewood Drive
Conway, SC 29526

Tribute Wall

DS

“ *Dr. Sessions was my favorite professor in grad school at Ga. State. His teaching highly influenced me as a high school English teacher and poet. Dan Spier, Marietta, GA*

Dan Spier - September 07, 2020 at 04:58 AM

DH

“ *I cannot express how sad I am to learn that he passed before I got to say goodbye. Dr. Sessions was a mentor and an inspiration. At the darkest time in my life, he told me to read poetry and I thought he was absolutely absurd. Now nearly twenty years on, I see that absurd was precisely the point. He would be proud of the Dorothy Parker and Frank O'Hara I keep on my desk that I turn to when things get sad, maddening, or silly. I owe him my language. I am grateful to have had this man in my life. I'm deeply sorry that I did not get to tell him again what he meant to me.*

Daniel Hughes - May 09, 2018 at 01:49 PM

DH

“ *Dr. Sessions taught me how to write (I already thought that I could write) when I was a graduate student at Georgia State University some 20 years ago. He once handed back a paper to me that was covered in red ink and said, "See, you get your money's worth." And I did. I took every class he offered, then I sat back and soaked in years of wisdom and knowledge. He was my idol.*

debra hartsfield

Debra Hartsfield - August 24, 2016 at 11:19 AM

DW

“ We deeply regret the passing of a dear friend and outstanding man. Eric and Andrew, please accept our love and prayers at this most difficult time. We are saddened to learn of your Father's death and we do look forward to seeing you at the memorial service at a later date.

*With Love and Prayers,
Dolores and Jim Waters*

Dolores and Jim Waters - August 20, 2016 at 02:43 PM

BP

“ Witty, urbane, uncommonly intelligent, with a wide-ranging curiosity, and an insatiable desire to advance the cause of literary studies in several of its incarnations, Bill Sessions was an intimidating model for junior faculty in the department of English at Georgia State, including myself. I profited in incalculable ways from his energies and dedication as a colleague (especially as graduate director in the 70s), and also from his friendship and support.

We cannot be irremediably sad about his passing. We can only regret that a life so well lived in its incredible variety had to end at all, as it must for everyone of us.

*Barton Palmer
Calhoun Lemon Professor of Literature
Clemson University*

barton palmer - August 17, 2016 at 02:38 PM

SC

“ *Dr. Sessions
I'm so sorry for your loss. I hope and prayer that Mr. and Mrs.
Sessions are together smiling down on you and your family.
My condolences
Salonia Cook*

Salonia Cook - August 17, 2016 at 02:25 PM

PT

“ *Bill was one of a kind-sui generis. His ability to convey the depth
and beauty of language were truly amazing. He was such a gifted
writer and speaker. His Flannery O'Connor lecture at Emory was
exceptional. Now he and Flannery will have much to discuss. His
stories were so charming, vivid, and full of brio. He was a kind and
generous soul from whom I learned much. His life gave so much to
the world. He was and remains a good soul.*

Phillip Thompson, Aquinas Center of Theology

Phillip Thompson - August 17, 2016 at 12:44 PM

NE

“ *Neema, Meg, Nadia, & Elena purchased the Sweetest Sunrise Bouquet for the family of William A. Sessions.*



Neema, Meg, Nadia, & Elena - August 15, 2016 at 11:18 PM

WP

“ Will miss you so very much, Bill. Thank you for your friendship, for all of the wonderful conversation we shared on O'Connor, and life.

My very best to your sons, and grandson, whom I know you loved so much.

I miss you already--and will pray for you, and your family.

Wendy Piper

wendy piper - August 15, 2016 at 06:36 PM

JW

“ What a beloved scholar, friend, and human being. Nobody was more encouraging to me in my early years as a scholar. I will always cherish memories of our talks at conferences about Spenser, Virgil, Surrey, our shared experiences of growing in the South, and the Church we both loved so dearly. Rest in peace, dear friend.

John Watkins

John Watkins - August 15, 2016 at 05:23 PM

RB

“ To his family, we would like to express our condolences and heartfelt sorrow at the passing of Bill Sessions ... As one who had known him since the late 1950s (when he was my English teacher!), and who, with my wife, Brenda, had literary and social interactions with Bill over these many years since, I speak for us both in saying we will miss him very much ! Bill was a unique and greatly gifted human being

Brenda and Cary Bynum

R. Cary Bynum - August 15, 2016 at 03:57 PM

SH

“ I am sorry for your loss. I hope that the words in 1 Thessalonians 4:14 help to bring you comfort. May you receive the peace and relief that you need at this time.

Sydney H - August 15, 2016 at 03:48 PM

DM

“ I met Dr. Session when, as an applicant to the Georgia State English Literature graduate program, I was selected to be a Fellow. I like to think it was my academic record which was the basis of this selection, but Dr. Session playfully suggested that perhaps it was based on my being of Greek heritage which matched the homeland of his wife whom he met when he was visiting Greece as a Fulbright scholar. Whatever the reason, I felt a kinship with Dr. Sessions, for he embodied the qualities of a good mentor; namely, he had a strong sense of justice and equality which he displayed in his private life and his academic excellence in his professional life which were a source of admiration. The Greek expression appropriate at this time I pass on to his family: May his memory be eternal.

Demetrius Mazacoufa - August 15, 2016 at 11:19 AM

JB

“ My heartfelt condolences to Dr Sessions's family; he was a great professor and mentor to me at Georgia State University as I worked toward the Phd in English. Judith Kapplin Blase

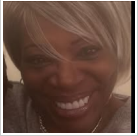
judith kapplin blase - August 15, 2016 at 10:41 AM

RR

“ *My deepest sympathies. All my thoughts are with you. Rochelle*



rochelle rubin - August 15, 2016 at 08:38 AM



“ *Dr. Session (linen) you have my condolences. May God bless you and your brother doing this time of bereavement. illa*

Illia Galloway - August 15, 2016 at 07:45 AM