



## Charles Rush Forker

March 11, 1927 - February 15, 2014

Charles Rush Forker, Professor of English Emeritus at Indiana University, was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the eldest son of Edson W Forker and Mary Rush Forker. He was educated at Western Reserve Academy ( a preparatory boarding school for boys in Hudson, Ohio), Bowdoin College (where he majored in English and Music), Merton College, Oxford (where he took a second B.A. degree as a Fulbright Scholar and then an M.A.), and Harvard University (where he earned his Ph.D.). During his Pittsburgh boyhood he aspired to be a professional musician, studied piano, and wrote a one-movement concerto for that instrument as a boarding-school teenager. Devoted also to English literature, he carried a copy of Shakespeare's sonnets in his pocket, and came to be known as "Reggie" (a mistaken interpretation of his middle initial) because of his passionate Anglophilia and interest in British royalty. Graduating at age 18 in 1945 near the end of World War II, he was immediately drafted and served two years in the U.S. Army First Division in Germany in the role of personal secretary to the division surgeon, a colonel who had been a cavalry officer and who taught Charles to ride by rousing him out of bed every morning and making him friends with a stable of captured thoroughbred horses, previously used by the Nazi high command for ceremonial purposes . He was also assigned briefly to the constabulary in Nurnberg where he did guard duty for several

weeks during the trial of the Nazi war criminals.

At Bowdoin (Longfellow's and Hawthorne's college) he cultivated his interest in Shakespeare, reading the entire corpus as a special project and acting in four Shakespeare plays as a member of the dramatic society\_ He was chosen to compete for a Rhodes scholarship but failed to make the final cut owing to his minimal aptitude for sports, although he went to Oxford nevertheless under an equally generous grant. - He was delighted to take a week off in 1953 just before his final Oxford exams to join the millions of - Londoners in the streets cheering Elizabeth II at her coronation. At Harvard he was particularly happy to be appointed a resident tutor at Kirkland House where he taught Harvard students majoring in English and always spoke of his four years in Cambridge as the high point of his intellectual journey. Strongly attached to New England because of his boyhood and family associations with the region, he fell in love with Boston, which always competed with San Francisco and Montreal as his favorite North American cities.

In 1957, as a freshly minted Ph.D., he joined the English Department at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, where he taught undergraduates in composition and literature. One of his classrooms was adjacent to the animal husbandry barn, a venue where his declamations of Hamlet and Richard III had to do battle with the reverberant squeals and groans of pigs and cattle. He joined Indiana University in 1959 and quickly rose through the ranks to become a full professor with tenure, a member of the graduate faculty, and a director of numerous Ph.D. dissertations. His favorite course, however, was a large lecture class for undergraduates called Introduction to Shakespeare in which the students read fourteen plays (a new one every week) and where rigorous examinations required them to identify passages by speaker and dramatic context, and to comment critically on their

relationship to the plays from which they were drawn. He loved the language of Shakespeare, wanted his students to share that love, and was notorious on the platform for imitating famous actors such as Laurence Olivier and John Gielgud, the latter having actually met and befriended him.

Forker was frequently invited to lecture at other universities as a visiting professor-at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; at Dartmouth College; at Concordia University, Montreal; and repeatedly at Colgate University in Hamilton, New York. As a specialist in Shakespeare and Elizabethan drama, he held fellowships at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C. and the Henry E. Huntington Library in San Marino, California. He often returned to Harvard during summers for research at the Weidner Library; as a younger man he also worked at the University of California, Berkeley. Invariably he spent his sabbaticals in London, doing research at the British Library and visiting Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare's birthplace, to use the Shakespeare Institute library and to attend as many Shakespearean performances as possible. His summer visits to the British capital became an annual ritual; over the years he developed many close friendships there and frequently remarked that he knew the city more intimately than any other major population center on either side of the Atlantic.

He published ten scholarly books during his career, four of them after his retirement from I.U. in 1992, and well over a hundred articles and reviews in scholarly journals. His magnum opus was an ambitious work on one of Shakespeare's contemporary dramatists, *Skull beneath the Skin; The Achievement of John Webster* (1986), a book that established his reputation as a leading authority on

Renaissance drama. A collection of his essays appeared as *Fancy's Images: Contexts, Settings, and Perspectives in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (1990); he produced four critical editions of individual Renaissance plays with long introductions, apparatus and commentary-Shirley's *The Cardinal*, Marlowe's *Edward II*, Shakespeare's *Richard II* (the Arden edition), and Peele's *Troublesome Reign of King John*. The edition of *Richard II* (2002) was officially adopted as a required text for all teachers of English throughout France's secondary schools, as a result of which Forker was invited to lecture at the Université de Caen in Normandy. In *Shakespeare: The Critical Tradition* (1997) he published an extensive and analytical historical anthology of writings on *Richard II*, tracing the reception history of the play from its initial appearance in 1591 to modern times. He also contributed articles to major reference works such as *The Encyclopedia of the Renaissance*, *The Shakespeare Encyclopedia*, *The Greenwood Companion to Shakespeare*, *American National Biography*, and *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Among professionals in his field he was known not only for his interpretive essays on English literature but also for philological, historical and bibliographical scholarship, and latterly for studies in the attribution of anonymous Elizabethan and Jacobean writings.

Charles was a passionate devotee of the arts, especially of theatre, film, and classical music. He was a member of the I.U. Theatre Circle and I.U. Friends of Music, attending concerts, ballets, operas, plays, and recitals on a regular basis. He participated actively in the Bloomington chapter of the National Association of Arts and Letters. He was a supporter of the Cardinal Stage Company and the Bloomington Playwrights Project, as well as an almost fanatical collector of records, CDs, and DVDs. An

observant Anglo-Catholic, diaries never missed Mass at Trinity Episcopal Church, where he was once a chorister and where he served for over half a century as acolyte, chalice bearer, thurifer, epistler, and crucifer. One of his several friends in the priesthood observed that he remained an altar boy into his eighties. He was a loyal member of the Guild of Scholars of the Episcopal Church, a group of lay Anglicans who meet regularly at General Seminary in New York City and which for six years he led as president. In his drinking days (before he came to terms with his incipient alcoholism) he was a meticulous mixer of dry martinis and boasted that he never approved a student's doctoral dissertation without making certain that the candidate was proficient in the ritualistic arcana of chilled glasses, Bombay gin, ice, dry vermouth, and the freshly peeled rind of lemon in the correct proportions. Never having even boiled water before he

arrived in Bloomington, he quickly became a student of "La Joie de Cuisine" (as he called *The Joy of Cooking*), as well as the two-volume classic on French cuisine by Julia Child (whom he once met at a butcher shop in Cambridge). And he searched out gourmet restaurants as assiduously as Anglo-Catholic churches both at home and abroad. He breakfasted daily with his friends and colleagues—at first in the Indiana University Memorial Union cafeteria, and then, after this location turned into a food court with plastic utensils and throwaway plates, at the Waffle House at 10th and College, where he became a habitual consumer of grapefruit sections, until the unfortunate closing of the "AW" ("Awful Waffle," as he lovingly called it), in September 2013.

He is survived by his two brothers, Dr. Edson Lee Forker of Fulton, Missouri; Dr. George N. Forker of Tucson, Arizona; and by his

longtime partner Dr. Lewis J. Overaker of Plymouth, New Hampshire.

A requiem Mass will be celebrated at Trinity Episcopal Church on Saturday, March 8<sup>th</sup> at 3:00 p.m., to be followed by interment in the Trinity columbarium and a reception for friends and family in the Trinity Great Hall. In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to the Trinity Episcopal Church Endowment Fund or to the Trinity Episcopal Church Daniel Music Fund. Allen Funeral Home 4155 South Old Highway 37 is handling the arrangements and online condolences may be sent to the family at [www.allenfuneralhome.org](http://www.allenfuneralhome.org).

# Tribute Wall

TW

“ It's saddens me about the loss of such a great man and short-time friend. It seemed that I knew him for much longer. I was Charles barber at the barbershop abd enjoyed whey visit with him and hearing about his stories from when he was younger. As a young gent that I am, I looked up to Charles and loved his spirit and "spunk." I will deeply miss this man and a great friend. Sending my thoughts to his family and friends

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**Trevor Werner** - October 26, 2015 at 04:07 PM

DA

“ We send you our deepest sympathy for your loss. We remember Charles as a superb scholar and a devoted member of Trinity Church. His work will live on.

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**David and Anne Sampson** - October 26, 2015 at 04:07 PM

DO

“ I never had Charles in a class when I was a Ph. D. student at IU, but some close graduate student friends of mine wer friends of his, so I was invited with them to his house on at least one occasion, and he was a guest at their homes on some occasions. He and I were both opera lovers, so over the years I saw him there and had a chance to exchange a few words. I admired his wit and intelligence.

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**Dorothy Deering** - October 26, 2015 at 04:07 PM