

Arthur William Bloom

October 17, 1939 – November 1, 2022



Arthur William Bloom, college theatre professor and administrator, author, and mentor to many college-bound students, died November 1 in a hospital near his home in Chalfont, PA. He was 83. The cause was kidney and heart failure.

Arthur was born October 17, 1939, in the Bronx, New York City, to Hyman and Sadie (Sonia) Bloom, who had been child immigrants from Jewish ghettos in Lithuania. He attended public schools in the Bronx and was fond of attending New York City theatre performances, which he could do in those days for 25 cents. In 1961, having cast off his family's expectations that he become a doctor and

after stage managing several college theatre productions, he graduated from Dartmouth College. In 1966, he received a Ph.D. in theatre history from Yale University and became an associate professor of dramatics at Fisk, the historically black university in Nashville, Tennessee. It was there that he met and married a fellow faculty member, Rena Fraboni. In 1970, the Blooms moved to Pullman, Washington, to teach at Washington State University.

In 1972, he became a professor and eventually chair of the theatre department at Loyola University of Chicago, where he remained for 13 years. His daughters Sarah (1973) and Jessica (1976) were born during this time. For the rest of his life he kept in touch with many of the Loyola students that he had challenged in classwork and directed in performances, following their careers with interest.

While at Loyola he was the recipient of a three-year Kellogg Fellowship aimed at identifying and educating potential leaders. He traveled with other fellows to places that shed light on the societal issues of the day, including China and Brazil. And after he told Kellogg that his dream had always been to visit the Grand Canyon, Kellogg funded a six-week automobile trip with his family across the United States. His Kellogg experience may not have made him a political leader, but it broadened his interests and

knowledge of the critical issues of the day. To the end, he read the New York Times daily and was a loyal liberal Democrat.

His last position as theatre department chair was at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas. In 1985 he began a new career in arts college administration, becoming Dean of Communication and Fine Arts at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. His final university position was as Dean of the College of Visual and Performing Arts at Kutztown University in Pennsylvania, from which he retired in 2001. His move to the East Coast meant that he could once more attend Broadway and off-Broadway shows, an activity he delighted in (at considerably more cost these days) until Covid darkened the New York theatres.

In 2000 he published his first book, a biography of Joseph Jefferson, the nineteenth-century American comic actor famous for his portrayal of Rip Van Winkle. He followed that with biographies of the tragic actors Edwin Booth (2013) and Edwin Forrest (2019). His final book, a biography of the American actress Charlotte Cushman, is in press and will be published later this year. His biographies, which included complete performance histories, were always exhaustively researched and met critical acclaim as definitive resource works.

In retirement, he began a volunteer career helping young people of limited means or challenging circumstances get into and pay for college. He began by working with teenagers in the foster care system, and eventually worked with more than 50 students, helping them with everything from SAT preparation to applications and scholarships. He demonstrated infinite patience in chasing down the required forms and made sure his “mentees” understood that this was an “extremely boring” process. He was proud of the fact that he had secured more than three million dollars in scholarships for them. Always delighting in working with young people, he kept in touch over the years with many of his mentees, who have often credited him with being instrumental in their lives.

In addition to working with college-bound students, he started a correspondence with several inmates in the New Jersey prison system, and, before Covid, often drove to New Jersey to meet with them in person, sometimes being the only visitor an inmate had. He read books with his inmate friends and helped them negotiate life in the constricting prison system.

He was generous, deeply loyal, and loving to his family, friends, and those he taught and helped. His witty humor and flare for dramatic storytelling made him beloved by everyone. His encouragement, and the sheer tenacity with which he approached life, inspired and improved the lives of many people who crossed his path.

Spending time with his family always came first. He strived to be the kind of parent he had wished for himself, one of selfless, unending love and support. He enjoyed taking his daughters to museums, on road trips, and to the theatre and movies. He welcomed his son-in-law, delighted to have “another guy” in the family. He loved to travel, and journeyed all over the planet from Argentina to Uzbekistan, and made quite a few culinary trips to Europe with his wife. He was always planning his next trip. His granddaughters, Rachel and Becca, brought him great joy. He loved watching them grow from babies to teenagers, always supporting their interests and sharing his love of theatre, education, and what to expect for dessert.

An only child, he kept in touch with his few living relatives and delighted in being a member of his wife’s large Italian-American family. He is survived by his wife, Rena Fraboni Bloom, and daughters Sarah Jacobson (Greg) of Alexandria, VA, and Jessica Bloom of Albuquerque; granddaughters Rachel and Rebecca Jacobson; brother-in-law Ron Fraboni of Minneapolis, and Ron’s daughters Marta and Janna and grandchildren.

Donations in his memory may be made to the County Theater in Doylestown at <https://countytheater.org/donate>.

Here’s a link to another copy of the obituary that includes a slide show prepared by the Bloom’s daughters:

<https://www.fluehr.com/obituary-detail.php?obitid=5792&obitnum=0/>