

Robert Edwin Hodder

Died: September 26, 2004

Bob died at age 66 of a heart attack on Sunday, September 26, 2004 in Stuart, Florida, where he had lived for many years about 100 miles north of Miami.

He grew up in Richmond, Virginia. In high school he was class president his senior year and vice-president his junior year. He was in the national honor society and involved in the school magazine and acting. He was an athlete. He played football, was on the track team, and was co-captain of the wrestling team.

At Dartmouth he majored in physics, pledged Kappa Kappa Kappa, rowed crew his first two years, and was on the wrestling team his second. His freshman year he was in the outing club.

Our classmates Sam Bell and Stan Bates knew Bob well from the beginning, and over the next 40 or so years, and both wrote lengthy recollections about him in June 2010, nearly six years after their friend's death.

Sam wrote, "Bob and I were among a very small group of Southerners in our class. We roomed together for three years in New Hampshire Hall, with Stan Bates. Stan was our resident scholar and Bob was the jock of our threesome. In our senior year Bob and Stan moved to KKK. Bob was a varsity wrestler and rowed heavyweight crew. He was a great roommate and his good humor and easygoing manner made him easy to live with."

Stan said, "Bob was my college roommate, lifelong friend, and brother-in-law."

After Dartmouth, Bob went on to graduate school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "The first five years away from Hanover were spent getting the Ph.D. — obligatory for a physicist," he later wrote for the 1986 25th Reunion Yearbook.

The doctorate was in solid-state crystalline physics. Wikipedia defines that field as one that "studies how the large-scale properties of solid materials result from their atomic-scale properties. Thus, solid-state physics forms the theoretical basis of materials science. It also has direct applications, for example in the technology of transistors and semiconductors."

Sam Bell in his recollection makes it concrete, informing us that while Bob was still a graduate student (in the mid-1960's), Bob developed a computer chip.

It wasn't all chips and solid-state crystalline physics for Bob, however. Here he is again in 1986, filling us in about those first five years out of Hanover. "These were years of courtship, marriage [to Jeanie Rice], parties, hard and exciting work, simple and well-identified goals, deep friendships, remarkable innocence, and a sense of complete satisfaction with where I was going at that stage of my life."

After getting his doctorate, Bob followed a career course that morphed in some interesting directions. For 10 years he was with United Technologies Corp., first doing basic research in low-temperature physics in Connecticut, then moving to Florida, where he worked on the company's high-energy laser program.

"This was the period," he wrote in 1986, "of first introduction to the corporate ladder, learning what a loss was, learning where money came from (not from research grants), starting a family, building the dream house, changes in relationships from individual friendships to friendships between families, conventional mores, conventional loyalties, and a general feeling that something wasn't quite right."

Bob then did some consulting with SRI (formerly known as Stanford Research Institute), which led to contracts with the Department of Defense in the area of high-energy laser development.

Bob then tacked again. In addition to consulting with the government, he formed his own consulting company, and started doing some consulting for private industry. "This has been a ball," he later wrote of the experience. "No bosses and lots of action ... characterized by strange working hours, lots of time spent in airports, evolution of the family into a strong but independent group of individuals, unconventional attitudes about almost everything, and a return to strong personal friendships."

An obituary written at the time of his death says that during this time frame, while running his own consulting business, Bob "developed a system for monitoring the future's market," something Stan Bates said was more specifically "an interest in neural networks as a modeling device for commodities trading." Whatever it was, Sam Bell wrote that Bob, with his wife, Jeanie, "became heavily involved in the commodities market as a trader."

In his Reflection for our 25th Reunion Yearbook in 1986, Bob wrote about his daughters Becky and Laura, and then about himself. "The old man still tries to keep in shape by bicycling for exercising and wind-surfing for fun. As a family we travel for entertainment, ski Utah for exhilaration and cruise our sailboat for relaxation. All in all a good twenty-five years."

In their 2010 recollections, both Sam and Stan record that at the time Bob passed away he lived with Jeanie in a home on the water with his boats nearby.

Stan wrote that Bob's "family was always his first priority, greatest love, and happily his greatest satisfaction. Bob and Jeanie had a beautiful home in Stuart, Florida, on the water, where he could keep his several boats. He had always loved sailing, and he had always wanted to live on the water. Bob lived his life exactly the way he wanted; he was deeply loved by all of those whom he deeply loved. He was the most honest, instinctively fair, and sympathetic person I've had the privilege of knowing. He was also one of the most intellectually curious people I've ever known; he always wanted to know more, and he always wanted to have a position advanced in conversation to be justified. He was tremendously fortunate in his marriage; in Jeanie, he found his soul mate. Bob was a good man; may we hope that that can be said for all of us."

Bob "had two wonderful daughters Rebecca and Laura," wrote Stan, and as of June 2010, a total of five grandsons.

"He is greatly missed," wrote Sam.