

Edwin Arthur Toothaker

Died: February 19, 2004

After a struggle over time with emphysema, Ed died on Thursday, February 19, 2004, in Green Valley, Arizona, where he had lived for many years. He was 66 years old.

Ed grew up as a child in Denver. His son Jeff wrote in an e-mail years later in October 2010, that “there are deep family ties in the area.” Despite the ties, Ed attended Vermont Academy in Saxton’s River, Vermont, before coming to Dartmouth. He was on the student council there, sang in the glee club, and played football, basketball, and baseball.

At Dartmouth, Ed majored in English and became a member of Kappa Sigma fraternity. He played football his freshman year, and baseball both his freshman and sophomore years. He was active in the flying club his first year at the college, serving as its corresponding secretary. As a senior, Ed became a member of Dragon.

Apart from the entries in the Green Book and the Aegis, there is no information about Ed, other than his Green Valley address, published in our 25th and 40th reunion yearbooks and in our 35th reunion directory.

Ed’s unique passions and character, however, have inspired remembrances from two of our classmates that together etch a fitting profile of his life since Dartmouth.

Our classmate Joe Zinn was Ed’s roommate their sophomore year, and lifelong friend. In July 2010, Joe wrote this about Ed:

“Ed and I became friends during freshman football, and it was the beginning of a great relationship built on many common interests. We roomed together during sophomore year and stayed in touch after graduation. He was one of the few individuals I always enjoyed being around — perpetually mirthful and occasionally mischievous. The stories he told about exploits in his high school years were hilarious.

While traveling in the West in 1975, I visited Ed and his family in Denver, meeting his wife and children, Jeff and Jenn. We had a fun evening, and seeing the love and attention the kids received from their father was heartwarming.

Ed had a fascination with the works of Shakespeare, and was quite upset when Dartmouth made the decision to downsize the Bard’s place in the curriculum. Ed eventually developed the controversial thesis that Shakespeare had been influenced by the ancient Greek philosophers, and cited “Troilus and Cressida” as a case in point. Ed authored a lengthy book in support of that argument. In 1977 Ed came east and moved in with me in New Jersey for a

few months. He hoped to ignite enough interest in the New York marketplace to get the book published, but his efforts were not rewarded.

In the following years we communicated off and on, debating the subtle philosophical points made in his book as well as the human condition and life in general. Over time our communications waned, and the shocking news of his passing brought a flood of warm memories along with regret that I had not known of his illness.

In a message I received shortly after his death, Ed's son Jeff told me [Joe wrote in his remembrance]:

‘... he was very much prepared for this final step and had prepared us as well. Everything was said that needed to be said. We had talks about regrets and ‘do-overs.’ But we have ultimately learned the courage to stick to your beliefs in the many faces of adversity and how to grow from each experience.’

What will always be kept in my heart is the memory of Ed's strength of character and innate goodness, which he shared with so many others and me.”

Another classmate, Chuck Dayton, who also roomed with “Tooth,” weighed in with these recollections, in October 2010:

Ed was different from anyone I had met. He was outrageous. Before I had ever been out west skiing, Ed extolled the joys of skiing in Colorado. His idea of a perfect day was skiing hard at Winter Park, and then crawling in between clean sheets with his girlfriend. Wow! Was I jealous.

He had unbelievable stories of his high school days. One, which Jim McElhinney confirmed, was that he and his buddies actually stole a cadaver from a hospital by donning white coats, then doused it with booze and hauled it, arms over their shoulders, to a bowling alley that had a superstitious janitor, bowled a few rounds and then left it there to be discovered.

We lived in 305 and 306 New Hampshire Hall. Ed, Ted Jzyk, Rick Reed, Bob McDonough, Joe Zinn, and me. We combined the two rooms at the end of the east wing of the third floor of New Hamp, making the four rooms into sleeping, study, and social.

Ed loved creative writing and language and we would sometimes critique each other's assignments. He was a good writer, and produced some excellent short stories. We lost touch, and I only saw him once after Dartmouth, passing through Denver, some time in the late 70's when he was running his own company.

Tom Conger, who for years has chronicled the lives of so many of our classmates, offers his own take on Ed, in an e-mail remembrance Tom composed in June 2010:

Big Ed Toothaker was older than most of us arriving in Hanover in 1957. Yeah, and bigger, too. After a post-grad year at Vermont Academy, having graduated from Denver South High School in '56, he was a man among boys when we hit Chase Field for the first of Pea Green Coach Earl Hamilton's two-a-day practices early that fall. He was already what so many of us aspired to become as the season progressed, vainly imagining, "if only I could be back playing high school football, knowing what I do now...!"

Ed took it all in stride. College life also. He was more than ready for it — could chug beer with the most decadent of upper classmen. And was catnip for the girls. But a friendlier cuss would be harder to find on campus.

Coming back for Bullet Bob Blackman's two-a-days in the late summer of '58, Ed drove his vintage green Buick from Denver with the trunk loaded to the weather stripping with cases of Coors "Banquet" beer — a rare commodity not available in retail stores east of the Rockies. Big Ed's concept was to run a sort of black market, servicing the refined tastes of lager connoisseurs from the eastern seaboard, and turning a profit on his personal inventory. But pressure from his close associates, and the fact that the unpasteurized product would spoil without refrigeration, led him to drink up almost the entire shipment with his pals in New Hamp and Kappa Sig — and he was just as happy.

As it turned out, Tooth wasn't exactly ready for the rigid academic standards upheld at late '50s Dartmouth, and was cordially invited by the dean corps to exercise a few terms of learning off-campus in the hallowed ivy halls of the US Army. From which he returned a chastened, and even more mature, student.

Make that an eager, avid, and voracious scholar. He simply could not get enough intellectual challenge: humanities, philosophy, history, literature — he craved it all.

I'm not certain exactly what Ed did after graduation; he did marry, had kids, divorced, and eventually re-married his original wife — briefly. There was some property in Green Valley, Arizona, that he acquired or somehow came into through family, but by the time we reconnected in the late '80s, all of that history had become sort of immaterial.

What was important to him then was The Bard. Ed was absolutely certain that he had fallen upon the secret to Shakespeare — that sonnet 121 was the

"Rosetta Stone" to Elizabethan literature as personified by Wm. Shakespeare, and as it related to "the Greeks" and all of western philosophy, whatever that might mean.

Essay after essay roared off his keyboard, testing the waters of his theory, and there was no scholar extant who was not barraged by letters from Tooth, offering up his findings, supported by literally reams of text, footnotes and references.

Unfortunately, for whatever reason, most of the intelligentsia whom he approached did not share Ed's zeal. Which only spurred him to greater lengths and depths of supporting data and concepts, which fell upon equally deaf and/or resistant ears.

Ed next took on the Dartmouth faculty, having completed his manuscript for the very scholarly treatise, "One To One: Sonnet 121, Shakespeare's Masterpiece — The Decline and Fall of Multiculturalism; the Great Disgrace of American Education." (Ed could never be accused of being concise: 341 pages about a 14-line poem?). Renaissance experts Peter Saccio, Donald Pease, Jeff Hart, David Kastan, Louis Renza, Peter Bien, and Lynda Booze were all besieged with thick packets of scholarship from an enthused and anxious author pleading his lofty case. Saccio and Pease both waded through the sea of verbiage, and responded to Ed at length — but not exactly supportively.

Ed, by now with lance in hand and spoiling for a fight, then took on the college administration — beginning back with President John Kemeny, and next up, James O. Freedman and James Wright. I suggested several times that he could draw more flies with honey than vinegar, but 'twas all for naught; Big Ed was taking on the best minds of America, and knew he had 'em beat. If only they'd listen ... Well, you get the drift.

At one time, Ed hosted a talk show on a local Arizona radio station, the subject matter being primarily education in the US, and other scholarly and or conservative material as his listening audience and callers would offer up. He got me on as a guest one Saturday, introducing me as a spectacular new author, a nascent successor to E.B. White, and hailed my humble first book "Banana Moon" as equal to The Canterbury Tales ... guys actually called in and discussed education with me. And writing as a trade. And did we actually eat human flesh in 'Hawayah' [Hawaii]? These were serious folks.

It happened that a high school classmate of mine from Punahou, one of the lovelier gals, had met Ed in Honolulu back in '56. I put them back in touch, and she, a genuine trooper, decided to fly to Arizona and visit him. She reported that it was an interesting interlude. Tooth was about 300 pounds of

bearded classicist, an enthusiastic bear of a man, who had lost all his teeth and preferred to go without his bridges — which made him hard to understand, as well as rather unusual looking. Sometime later he reconnected with his former wife, moved to a posh section of LA, and was employed in an upscale men's store, 'locked in 9 to 5 traces,' selling suspenders and cravats. It didn't last long. He returned to Green Valley.

When Ed's son Jeff called to tell me his dad had died, from complications of emphysema, I was caught off guard. His marathon telephone calls had tapered off in recent months, and I had merely assumed he'd hit upon another avenue in which to exercise his considerable scholarship. I couldn't make it to the mainland for the small family service, but Jeff was going to try and get to the '61 65th birthday party in Palm Springs. When we had to cancel out for a last-minute medical emergency, I was chagrined to miss meeting the son of a true class character — to give him a hug for a loyal old buddy. Mai poina (Hawaiian for "never to be forgotten").

In the college archives there appears an undated written notice, or very brief obituary, announcing Ed's death. It is typed and printed out, but is not a photocopy of a published document. Perhaps it was intended as an obituary to be printed in the Alumni Magazine, but never was. It was obviously written shortly after Ed's death, though it doesn't carry an exact date. It is stripped of identifiers. Its provenance is unclear.

It seems authentic, however, and reads in part [as very slightly edited]:

"TOOTHAKER, EDWIN A., 66, passed away peacefully on February 19, 2004. He is survived by his sister, Patricia ... son Jeff ... granddaughter Joselyn and daughter Jennifer.... He was an author, philosopher, and a brilliant, humorous, passionate and deeply loving man who lived a rich, eventful life. Genio Socratem."

"Genio Socratem?" What do those Latin words mean? Is the reference as intentional as it appears to be?

In Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, England, in the same church where Shakespeare was baptized, there's a funerary monument to the Bard (says Wikipedia). Beneath a bust of the great poet and playwright that sits atop the monument, there's a two-line epigraph carved in stone in Latin that in part contains those two words, "Genio Socratem."

Given Ed's passion for scholarly sleuthing, especially as it relates to his beloved bard, it's possible he might have appreciated the effort to trace their literal meaning and significance, so we inquired.

What we have found from Ed's son, Jeff, is that the Latin words and the reference were deliberate. Jeff wrote the mysterious "document" found in college archives. In his October 2010 e-mail, Jeff said [in a communication slightly edited, as is the notice to which it refers]:

"The 'document' is the obit that I wrote for the Denver Post/Rocky Mountain News (there are deep family ties in the Denver area).

As for the 'Genio Socratem' reference, my father was fully aware of the monument to Shakespeare ... he dedicated his life to the works and history of Shakespeare and how Shakespeare was motivated/influenced by the Greeks, especially Socrates. Having grown up with the exposure to such scholarship, we [Ed, his son, and family] ... appreciated that Shakespeare's 'friends and neighbors' not only knew of and appreciated the teachings of Socrates, but attributed the same acknowledgement of 'genius' to their hometown 'hero' [Shakespeare].

For me, it was a fitting statement for my father. He was a great man ... just liked his cigarettes too much."

The Latin epigraph carved in stone on Shakespeare's funerary monument in Stratford-upon-Avon reads in full:

"IVDICIO PYLIUM, *GENIO SOCRATEM*, ARTE MARONEM,
TERRA TEGIT, POPULUS MAERET, OLYMPUS HABET [emphasis added].

The first of the two lines translates as, "A Pylian in judgment, a *Socrates in genius*, a Maro in art," comparing Shakespeare to Nestor the wise King of Pylus, to the Greek philosopher Socrates, and to the Roman poet Virgil (whose last name, was Maro).

The second line of the Latin epigraph translates as, "The earth buries him, the people mourn him, Olympus possesses him." [Account courtesy of Wikipedia.]

Ed knew all about this funerary monument, the Latin epigraph, and the reference to Socrates, and the regard that Shakespeare's contemporaries and community had for their hero's love of the classics. That was a point — a theme in the bard's work — that Ed had been trying to make all along.

Underneath the Latin epigraph on the funerary monument, and also carved in stone, there's a poem, that Ed must have known about as well. The poem engraved beneath Shakespeare's bust in the funerary, in modern orthography [says Wikipedia] reads:

Stay, passenger, why goest thou by so fast?
Read, if thou canst, whom envious Death hath placed

Within this monument: Shakespeare, with whom
Quick nature died, whose name doth deck this tomb
Far more than cost, sith [i.e. since]
all that he hath writ
Leaves living art, but page, to serve his wit.