

In Memoriam: Robert T. Henderson

[Editor's Note: Following the death of Robert T. Henderson, President of the International Association for Learning Laboratories, the IALL Journal has collected thoughts about and memories of "Bob." The words and pictures which follow demonstrate the impact he had on so many members, as well as the vibrancy of his legacy.]

Robert was so full of life and in control both during IALL '95 and this summer's meetings in Victoria in June. I will always remember him so calm and collected, so in control despite our IALL Council's tendency sometimes to get carried away with too much detail or debate. Yet he was able to do it with a smile and a wink, keeping everyone on board and happy. After eight or more long years working with Bob as Secretary, President-Elect and then President, I will surely miss his professional and personal spirit that was so much a part of IALL for me and many others.

—Robin Lawrason
Temple University

How many lab directors does it take to open a Volvo trunk? Robert Henderson drove Pete Smith, Jan Marston, and me back to the University of Victoria campus after a delightful dinner at Peter Liddell's house this past summer. We started by teasing Robert about the 1996 black Volvo rental car (with leather seats!) that he was driving. He protested that he had been "forced" to take it by the rental agency that could not produce the car it had originally promised to him. The he showed us some of the fancy features it had, and it had many. "Only one thing," Robert said, "I can't figure out how to open the trunk."

We leapt into action. Jan suggested reading the manual. We did. It didn't help. *[Editor's Note: I have yet to read a manual and saw no reason to start.]* Pete and Robert began pressing all the buttons. It was the kind of scene in which the wipers ran,

the washers washed, the radio played, the antenna went up and down, and Robert's seat tilted and moved forward and back. Finally some switch or other showed itself, and, collectively we managed to get the trunk open. Robert was clearly pleased.

—*Urusla Williams*
University of Notre Dame

Kind, gentle, knowledgeable, unpretentious Bob! I will never forget his self-introduction to our small group of participants at the NFLRC's "Pedagogy of the Internet" seminar in Honolulu less than two weeks before his passing: "... and I am Robert Henderson from the University of Pittsburgh. I am affiliated with IALL."

Later in my presentation, I tried to correct his previous introduction with, "And you should all know that Bob is actually *President* of IALL" But then I realized again Bob's deeper wisdom, that a truly respected leader is not one who draws attention to his/her own being, but one who draws attention to the organization itself and graciously accepts the opportunity to be of service to that organization's worthy mission in whatever capacity s/he can best offer, whether it be as IALL President or as a basic supportive fee-paying member from a little lab in Nowhere.

Bob's last week here on earth was enthusiastically devoted to making more effective application of technology in language learning, particularly in the Less Commonly Taught Languages. And his last words in the *IALL Journal* (Volume 28, Number 3) were an encouragement to make continually better usage of LLTI, the Foreign Language Software Database, and the IALL Home Page.

Thus, it seems that a most fitting memorial to Bob, one that he would probably be pleased with, is our steadfast united work to provide "immediate access to information that will help us make a positive contribution to language learning programs at our institutions around the world."

We will put forth our best efforts, forgetting neither your ambitions nor you as an exemplary president serving the profession, Bob! A deep and warm thank you with "aloha" from all of us.

—*Fawn Whittaker*
BYU—Hawaii

My first memory of Bob Henderson was at an IALL Leadership Conference at the University of Colorado at Boulder back in 1990. I recall seeing Bob who at that time had no official IALL position and wondering why anyone would take the time and expense to attend a bunch of meetings. I quickly learned that he was simply interested in the organization and profession, and was there to learn and to contribute in any way possible.

That attitude seemed to exemplify Bob's approach to IALL. All of his official involvement came after he had already proven his dedication and loyalty. One never had the attitude that Bob was seeking honors for himself. Quite to the contrary, he humbly accepted the duties given to him, and fulfilled them in a quiet, dignified, professional manner.

I for one will greatly miss this gentle-man whose spirit of service typifies the IALL organization.

—*Read Gilgen*
University of Wisconsin

Tandberg Educational joins our IALL colleagues in mourning the loss of Bob Henderson. We remember Bob as a dedicated leader of IALL, calling up fellow aviator Jim Desch, the Tandberg representative in Pennsylvania, and saying "Jim, listen to this: [sound of tapping]. That, Bob explained, "was the sound of the gavel of the new President of IALL." We remember him as proud of his position and eager to promote the use of technology in the service of language teaching. We remember Bob as a man of integrity who did not shirk responsibility, but indeed sought it. We remember him as a motivator; one who inspired others to get involved with IALL and be active at the local level. These efforts will be a memorial to Bob. His selfless dedication to the field sets an example for us all.

—*Erik Moseby*
Tandberg Educational

Bob Henderson was not only a fine President of IALL, he was a gentleman. All of us remember his ability to smooth over disagreements, his ability to raise only one eyebrow when he couldn't express his thoughts out loud and his genuine interest in all of IALL's members. Many of us also remember his pipe playing, his pride in his Scottish heritage, and his ready laugh.

This spring, one of my high school colleagues here in New York called me up to tell me how wonderful it was to meet Bob at a conference this spring. The person told me that it was incredible to meet the president of a major organization like IALL who actually cared enough to talk to a high school teacher, a president whose graciousness and obvious interest was remarkable.

I will also remember his kindness. Who else would get up at 5 a.m. on a Sunday morning to drive IALL members to the airport so they would not have to worry about getting a taxi at that time of the morning? Who else would calmly help foreign guests sort out hotel bills at that time of the morning? Who else would be able to move IALL in many new directions, getting so many people with strong personalities to agree to working together?

All of the International Association of Language Learning members will miss Bob Henderson for his leadership, his calm presence, and his kindness. We knew, instinctively, that Bob cared for all of us as people as well as colleagues and we responded to him that way, too. I hope we now keep his light alive in our future as an organization and that we remember how Bob's kindness and caring have moved us forward. We have been exceedingly blessed to have had him as our leader and our friend.

—Mike Ledgerwood
SUNY—Stony Brook

It was a great shock to learn the sudden death of Robert in Hawaii. Please accept my sincere condolences. I still remember his warm presence at IALL conference in Kansas. We expected his vigorous initiative in FLEAT III.

—Satoru Tagaya
Baika Women's College

I received Nina Garrett's letter last Friday and was shocked by the news of Bob Henderson's death. It was, in fact, this letter which prompted me to finally get myself an e-mail address.

When I attended the conference last year, I felt rather awkward being the only Filipino; and though I did grow up in New York, I hadn't been to the U.S. in 20 years. Regrettably I met very few people and I left the conference without meeting Bob Henderson. His death has disturbed me nonetheless.

I left South Bend with a memory of Bob Henderson wearing a Scottish kilt and playing the bagpipes. The memory stood for me as a symbol of what surprised me as I attended session after session of the IALL '95—that IALL was not only an association of professionals with similar interests and fields of expertise, it was also a community.

—*Issy Reyes*
University of the Philippines

Being a recent member to IALL, I never had the opportunity to personally meet Robert Henderson. But I have heard of his significant academic contributions. Any loss of life is, in our culture, a tragic loss, and none more so tragic than when a life is prematurely taken. My condolences to the members of IALL and to the family and friends of Robert Henderson. He will be remembered and his memory will live on in those who carry on in the projects and activities that Robert Henderson so willingly participated in.

—*Daniel Meyers*
University of Toledo

On the morning of July 30, 1996, we offered a silent prayer for Dr. Henderson prior to the keynote speech at this year's general assembly of the Language Laboratory Association of Japan. His picture was projected onto the large screen on which his speech outline was to be shown.

As for me, I was encouraged by Robert when I went to the IALL conventions at the Universities of Kansas and Notre Dame. On both trips, I was looking for someone to talk to. He never failed to find me to say, "Hello, Mr. Hatori. Nice to see you here."

After we finished the Leadership Meeting at the University of Victoria at the end of June, a Japanese friend and I were about to get into our car when Dr. Henderson appeared with his camera in his hand and wearing a UVic baseball cap. I will never forget his smile and his words, "I will see you in Tokyo next month."

—*Hiroyo Hatori, President*
Language Laboratory Association
of Japan

Bob represented the best of our profession. I will give one small illustration. Shortly after IALL '95, the CALICO '95 Symposium was held at Middlebury College. Bob and others took turns working at the IALL booth throughout the conference. On the afternoon of the last day, it was time to get ready to leave. We packed up the IALL banner and the remaining brochures and other IALL materials into several boxes and carried them to Bob's car. We were "conferenced out" and exhausted. We walked back to the now-dismantled IALL booth to make one last check to see that nothing had been left behind. We dropped down into a couple of chairs to rest for a few minutes.

Two CALICO participants from outside the United States appeared. Struggling to express themselves in English, they explained that they were planning a new multimedia-equipped language learning center. They stated that their time frame was short and that they needed whatever help IALL could provide as soon as possible. I recall thinking to myself, "So where were you all week? We're closed now!" But Bob took their request very seriously. After patiently negotiating a short conversation to ascertain what they needed, he went back to his car, unpacked a box, and retrieved an order form for the IALL lab planning kit. He did all of this in the most pleasant and helpful manner possible.

A perhaps insignificant-sounding act of professionalism. But it was performed in almost total obscurity, and I think it showed the measure of dedication of this man. Bob served us well, and it's hard for me to imagine IALL without him.

—*Claire Bradin*
Michigan State University

All of us at the National Language Resource Center, San Diego State University, were devastated to learn of Robert Henderson's untimely, tragic passing. His dedication to enhancing language learning through technology will remain as a permanent memorial.

—*Gail Robinson-Stuart*
National Language Resource Center

One of my fondest memories of Bob occurred at ACTFL '93 in San Antonio, Texas. After a day of sessions, we had a leisurely dinner on the balcony of a restaurant overlooking the Riverwalk. The food and the margaritas were delicious. After dinner we walked along the Riverwalk and ended up

in the Main Plaza or Market Square in front of a hat shop.

Bob said that he'd packed his boots which he hadn't worn in awhile and had been entertaining the thought of buying a cowboy hat to go with them. Before we knew it, we were inside intent on finding the perfect hat. I still remember so well the two of us staring into the mirror evaluating each hat he tried on—simultaneously shaking our heads with disapproval at some, pausing over others, laughing aloud at a few of them. Hat after hat he tried, and with each hat he tried the more absorbed we became in the process. And then he put on *the* perfect hat. Bob hesitated—he hadn't planned on one with the silver trim—on one quite so flashy. But it looked great. He bought his hat and walked out of the store wearing it. The next day when I saw him he had his boots on too.

Months later when I saw him at a conference he recounted how much he was enjoying his hat and how many compliments he had received. He told me that whenever someone complimented him, he would tell them a good friend helped him to pick it out. I remember thinking how nice it was for him to tell me.

Much later when I saw him again at a conference he told me that he had been caught in a rainstorm and that his hat had gotten wet, losing its shape. We both emphatically agreed that one most certainly could not wear a cowboy hat that had lost its character! We reminisced about how much fun we'd had in that little store with hats piled up to the ceiling.

It was a special hat—and so was the person who wore it.

—*Mary Beth Barth*
Hamilton College

Although a member of IALL for some years, I had never been to one of its conferences until 1993. As a non-American, I knew hardly anybody when I arrived in Lawrence. Bob was one of the first to greet me and to take an interest in me and where I came from. During that Kansas conference, we talked a lot and I was struck by his warmth and his professionalism.

When we met again at South Bend (without having had more than passing contact in the intervening two years), he welcomed me as if we were long lost friends. That is the image I retain of Bob, and, as he bore a striking physical resemblance to somebody else I know, I shall have no trouble in recalling his kindly expression and generosity of spirit.

—*Michael Andrewes*
University of Otago

Robert, David Malicki and I often rode together to attend NEALL and IALL meetings. I have many fond memories of those trips.

Robert loved to explore and to visit new places. One night during a NEALL conference at St. Joseph University, Robert decided to forego the partying so that he could get a feel for the city by night. At midnight, Robert was strolling about downtown Philadelphia all by himself!

I will miss Robert's company on these trips; his cheerful, upbeat enthusiasm and interest in so many things gave everyone new energy. I will miss phoning him with questions and hearing his warm melodic voice at the other end of the line. I will forever remember him playing the bagpipes for all of us at IALL '95.

—Leslie Graul
Thiel College

Although my acquaintance with Bob Henderson was not a long one, I recognized, as always, a fellow "burgher." I remember him not so much for his position as head of the regional leaders of IALL, an accomplished bagpiper piping at Ursula Williams' house while O.J.'s Bronco sped down the freeways of Los Angeles, but rather as a friend with whom I might commiserate via email about the Steelers and Pirates. As a transplant to the West coast, I was able to reach out via email and contact a friend who felt the same fervor about a subject as I. I will sorely miss this gentle compadre.

—Marti Morandi
Willamette University

On behalf of the University of Hawai'i National Foreign Language Resource Center Summer Institute faculty, staff, and participants, I would like to express our profound sadness at the death of Robert Henderson. Bob is remembered for the kindness, humor, enthusiasm, professional dedication, and sense of aloha he demonstrated as a participant in 1995 and 1996 NFLRC summer institutes; he will be greatly missed by everyone associated with the program.

—David Hipple
NFLRC Summer Institute

News of Bob's death a stunning event. It was incomprehensible. But, of course, it was impossible. It simply wasn't true. As the reality of things set in, I was left simply wordless, unable to express, or understand the complexity of emotions—sadness mixed with frustration and anger that something like this could occur—that I felt. I still feel too inarticulate to express my thoughts and feelings. But I would like to note a poem that I think expresses some of my feelings better than I ever could. In memory of Bob, the poem "Dirge," by Percy Bysshe Shelley:

Rough wind, that moanest loud
Grief too sad for song;
Wild wind, when sullen cloud
Knells all the night long;
Sad storm, whose tears are vain,
Bare woods, whose branches strain,
Deep caves and dreary main,
Wail, for the world's wrong!

I wanted to note also a quotation that I came across a few months ago that left a deep impression on me. Benjamin Disraeli said, "Most people will go to their graves with their music still in them." I note this because all of us who knew Bob were fortunate: Bob did not keep his music—that is, his kindness, his knowledge, his friendship, his caring, his enthusiasm, and yes, the marvelous pipe music of his Scottish heritage—locked within him. He shared it with us, and we are all very much the richer for it. I think that for many years Bob's music will echo through IALL, and in all of our hearts.

—*Ed Dente*

Tufts University

During a FLEAT II outing in Japan, Bob bolsters the spirits of LeeAnn Stone. (Photo courtesy of Sue Otto.)



Taking the helm from Trisha Dvorak, IALL '95, University of Notre Dame. (Photo by Robin Lawrason.)



Socializing during the Summer Leadership Conference, University of Victoria, 1996. (Photo by Ed Dente.)



With members of the IALL Board and IALL '95 Organizing Committee, University of Notre Dame. (Photo by Ed Dente.)





Robert T. Henderson
1945 – 1996