

## In Memory: Robert Wesley Hobbs, PhD. 1938 - 2013

*Editor's Note: Following is the official obituary from the funeral home in Owings, Maryland, and three remembrances from ASA members. Services for Bob were held January 16. Memorial donations in Bob's memory may be made to the Friendship United Methodist Church Music Program or the Church Building Fund, P.O. Box 72, Friendship, MD 20758.*



**R**obert "Bob" Wesley Hobbs, PhD, age 74, of North Beach, MD passed away peacefully January 11, 2013 at his residence. Bob was born January 28, 1938 in Chester, West Virginia, to Sara (Caughey) and Harry Spivey Hobbs. He was raised in Chester and graduated from Chester High School. He received a bachelor's

in physics at Case Institute of Technology in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1960, and then received his PhD in Astronomy at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan. He and his first wife Mary Ann McLaughlin came to the Washington, DC, area in 1964 in order to work at Naval Research Laboratory. He went on to work at NASA Goddard where he met Bee DeLung. Bob and Bee married at Friendship United Methodist Church on June 7, 1980. He then went on to the aerospace company CTA where he worked on many projects including the Hubble Space Telescope. He retired at age fifty-five in 1992.

Bob had a rich set of hobbies and interests. He was president of the Azalea Society of America from 1988 to 1990 and editor of *The Azalean* from 1988 to 1998. He loved keyboard instruments, including building a harpsichord in 1964 and reviving a wide range of other instruments from player pianos, a theater organ, several pianos, a clavichord, and a large church organ. He was a life member of the Organ Historical Society (since 1964) and member of the Theater Organ Society, Musical Box Society, and Carousel Society.

Bob was also deeply involved in his church and community. He was the organist at Friendship United Methodist Church from 1982 to 2009. He and his wife Bee also volunteered at SCAN food bank and continued to support local senior citizens after Interfaith Vol-

unteer Caregivers dissolved.

Bob is survived by his devoted wife Belinda L. "Bee" Hobbs of North Beach; a son James David Hobbs and wife Lisa of Washington, D.C.; a daughter Anne Marie Stallings and husband Joshua of Cheverly, MD. He is also survived by grandchildren Chloe Magnolia Hobbs and Astrid Lilac Hobbs, and Violet Sophia Stallings and Evan B. Stallings; Brother John David Hobbs and his wife Rose Marie, niece Dr. Nedda Hobbs all of Belmont, MA, and his sisters-in-law Laura DeLung, Eva Kenner and Sandra Kiernan.

### One of the Great Ones—Bob Stelloh

Over the years, the Azalea Society has been blessed with a large number of good leaders and workers, including a handful of great ones. Bob Hobbs was one of the great ones. Among his noteworthy accomplishments on behalf of the Azalea Society was being our national president for three years starting in 1988. As if that wasn't enough, Bob was editor of *The Azalean* from 1989 to 1998, along with his wife Belinda "Bee" Hobbs. He was also a significant member of the Historical Organ Society, he restored organs and similar musical instruments as a hobby, and he was the church organist for the Friendship Methodist Church in Friendship, Maryland, for 20 years.

Bob was brilliant and wise yet patient and humble, and he had the willingness and skills to both tackle the big picture and the attention to small details needed to solve problems. He also had an obvious love of others, which made him a really nice person to be around. Many years ago my late wife Denise and I were fortunate to have gone on a garden-visiting cruise to the Leeward Islands of the Caribbean with Bob and Bee and their friends and neighbors Sue and George Switzer, which let me learn about Bob in a social setting. It was a wonderful experience!

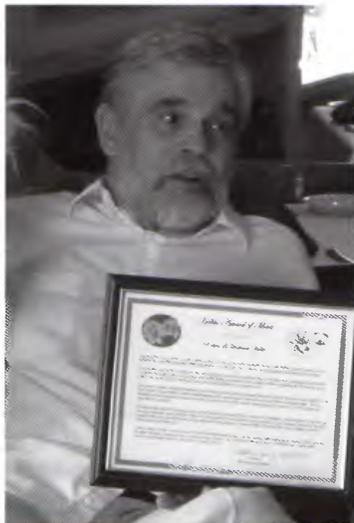
We owe the current look and feel of *The Azalean* to the Hobbs. When they took over in 1989, it had already evolved from a folded newsletter to a stapled 24-page black/white magazine with Dr. Charles Evans as editor. Typical of Bob's scientific background, his first editorial discussed the problems of obtaining articles, rising costs, and enhancing value to the readers in part by using color (which would of course increase costs). The Hobbs introduced a color cover in 1990 and inside color photos in 1991—and paid for it by taking over the typesetting and layout themselves rather than using the previously paid-for outside service.

Bob helped reduce the perpetual problem of not having enough articles for *The Azalean* by doing some of it himself—he attended and wrote the after-the-fact convention articles himself during the Hobb's 10 years as editors. He frequently encouraged all of us to submit articles. I particularly remember a roundtable discussion he organized and led at our 1995 convention in Rockville, Maryland, on ways to improve the magazine and how to “inspire contributors to the journal.”

We all learn something from everyone we know and work with. If we are lucky, we have a few close associates as mentors to look up to and learn from. Thank you, Bob, for having been one of my mentors.

### Generosity Himself—Barbara Stump

I first met Bob Hobbs in the spring of 1999. After having been hired as the first paid editor of *The Azalean*, he and Bee had offered to help me learn the ropes. We agreed that I would help co-edit the first couple of issues of 2000 then take over with the summer issue. Not only did he and Bee offer to help me, but they also invited me to join them at their North Beach home in Maryland. My brother lived in Ellicott City at the time, so I was able to visit him and then drive down for my training. It turned out to be a very snowy weekend, and I nearly got snowed in at their home.



Bob and Bee were truly gracious in telling me all about their 10 years as co-editors of *The Azalean*. Now that shows how strong their relationship was. So many editors are critical types, as some of you know from experience. They showed me their file boxes of work, which was daunting. They described how Bob learned a layout program so he could save

the Society costs, and they described how they took the issues to the post office themselves, after printing and sticking the labels. Talk about dedication to the Society. He explained, patiently, why single quotes around azalea and rhododendron names belong inside terminal punctuation, in spite of my English-major training. I was amazed to see one of his pipe organs, as well. They showed me their azalea garden under its protective blanket of snow. All in all, it was an amazing in-

roduction to so much that makes the Society great and welcoming to new people.

As I helped them with the following two issues, they both were patient and consistent, always ready to help. When I took over the job, Bob remained on the editorial review board for years, continuing to give pertinent advice. As I saw him and Bee at various conventions, they continued to be helpful and interested in *The Azalean* and chimed in frequently about the need for more articles from the membership. It was fun, I'm sure, for him to be able to just enjoy the azaleas as plants and not just topics for articles. I did not know him as well as many of the rest of you, but I can join in your chorus of thanks for this intelligent, giving, soul.

### Remembering a Friend—Harold Belcher

I've known Bob since 1966 when he and Mary Ann moved next door to me. I knew that Bob was interested in music and pipe organs in particular. Bob wanted to build a structure in their backyard to house a large pipe organ. My parents gave Bob and Mary Ann a variance to allow them to build the structure and I helped Bob with some of the construction. I enjoyed working with him on the organ house in his backyard and helped move the large (two stories) pipe organ into the structure. It was a work of art and reminded me of the pipe organ in Captain Nemo's submarine the Nautilus in *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*. When we were finished, I remember asking Bob if bats would fly out when he played. Bob replied with a smile, “I hope not but we'll see.” I enjoyed hearing him play the organ in the evenings; however, I never saw any bats fly out when he played.

I knew that Bob was an astronomer. We talked about astronomy and about the comet Kohoutek, circa 1973, and space research. Kohoutek was billed as the “Comet of the Century” by the media but turned out to be a blip in the sky that was difficult to see. I remember talking to Bob about Kohoutek and he commented that sometimes things don't turn out as we expect. Amen to that!

Bob worked at the Naval Research Laboratory (NRL) before moving on to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland. When I worked at NRL, after Bob had moved to Goddard, I discovered that we both had worked with some of the same scientists. That made for some interesting conversations and reminiscence.

I watched Bob's and Mary Ann's children, David and Ann Marie, grow up next door. They were the light of his life. I particularly enjoyed the “Easter Egg Hunt,”

a tradition that continues to this day with the children and grandchildren. I also enjoyed seeing some of Bob's and David's science projects, particularly the rockets. I used to do the same thing although on a much less sophisticated level.

Bob and Mary Ann separated and I only saw Bob a few times when he visited his children. Although I lost track of him for many years when he moved to North Beach, Maryland, I fondly remembered his friendship, humor and intellect while he was my neighbor. I was fortunate to be able to rekindle that friendship with Bob and meet his wife Belinda (Bee) Hobbs. Their friendship prompted me to join the Ben Morrison Chapter about a year or so prior to our 2004 Convention in Bowie, MD.

Pat and I often visited Bob and Bee at their home in North Beach, to enjoy their company and take cuttings of their azaleas. We took Bob and Bee to Glen Echo to see the historic Dentzel carousel and the Wurlitzer pipe organ, which is still there, from 1921 when it first opened in the twelve-sided building at Glen Echo Park. There are pictures of the Dentzel carousel and Wurlitzer 165 Band Organ at: <http://nationalcarousel.org/psp/GlenEcho/>. Bob, Bee, Pat and I all took several rides on the carousel that afternoon and were fortunate to be able to chat with the person responsible for its operation and the care of the Wurlitzer pipe organ. Bob enjoyed talking to the operator and discussing the intricacy of pipe organs. On one of our visits, we had lunch at the Irish Inn at Glen Echo. On another visit we had a picnic lunch and enjoyed Bee's excellent chocolate chip cookies. We enjoyed those trips, and their company, immensely.

When Bob asked me to step up as president of the chapter, I readily agreed on the condition that he would serve as my vice president. Over the four years that I served as president of our chapter, from July 2005 until July 2008, Bob was my vice president. Afterwards he provided valuable support by helping me secure speakers for our meetings, providing counsel and listening to my ideas. I couldn't have done what I did without his (and Bee's) help. His contacts within the Azalea Society of America and from his many years in the community provided invaluable assistance in obtaining speakers for our meetings.

The Ben Morrison Chapter presented Bob and Bee Hobbs with the Hobbs Award of Merit on June 11, 2012. The award was presented by Jim Duffy, the chapter president, at the Pirate's Cove Restaurant in Galesville, Maryland. Several members of the Ben Morrison Chapter were present. The Hobbs Award of Merit says

in part: "There being no better representation of the friendship, good humor, love for azaleas and enthusiastic support of its activities, the Ben Morrison Chapter, as an expression of its respect, admiration, and affection, hereby establish and confer upon Robert and Belinda Hobbs its first Hobbs Award of Merit." Bob provided his help and support for our Chapter for over 30 years since it was formed in 1980.

Over the past few years, Bob and Bee looked forward to and enjoyed visits by his children and grandchildren (Chloe and Astrid Hobbs and Violet and Evan Stallings) who continued to be a source of great joy and delight. Bob would always smile when talking about them. Pat and I consider ourselves very lucky to have known Bob Hobbs and to have shared in the friendship and fellowship of the Hobbs family.



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