

Memorial Minute for Philip Reid
Read by C. John Burk, Faculty Meeting April 25, 2012

1

Philip D. Reid died Sunday, March 4, less than two months ago and just two days before his 75th birthday. Born on March 6, 1937, in Ypsilanti, Michigan, he was the youngest of eight children. He was raised and educated in Ypsilanti until his undergraduate studies there at Eastern Michigan University were interrupted by two years in the Army Signal Corps. He then completed his Bachelor's degree and went on to the University of Missouri in Columbia to take a Master of Arts degree in Botany, working on the ecology of the sunflower, *Helianthus mollis*. After two years as a research biologist for the UniRoyal Corporation, he returned to academic life and entered the graduate program at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, where he studied the effects of gibberellic acid on the corn plant, *Zea mays*.

The plant scientists at Smith College first got to know Phil during this period – as a frequent visitor at lectures and seminars and as one of the more convivial members of the Valley botanical community. Although he left the area briefly to take up a post-doctoral appointment at the University of California in Riverside, he soon came back at our invitation in 1971 to accept an appointment as an assistant professor in the Department of Biological Sciences.

The task of describing his subsequent career at Smith has in some ways been greatly simplified because Phil was remarkably diligent in maintaining an updated curriculum vitae with entries made as recently as September 2009. For that reason, the task has also been made more difficult because of the many and various activities the CV documents, at the College and within his profession. He rose steadily through the academic ranks, and was promoted to Associate Professor in 1976, full Professor in 1982, and the Louise C. Harrington Professorship in Botany in 1991. This progression was undeterred by the several administrative positions he was asked to take on. Thus he served as Director of Graduate Study from 1975 to 1978, as Assistant to the President under Jill Conway from 1978-1984, as chair of Biological Sciences from 1986-1989, as acting Director of Graduate Study from 1991 to 1992 and as Acting Director of Clark Science Center from 1998-2000.

Remarkably, in all of this, he was able to maintain a lively career in teaching and research and he was unusually generous in sharing his enthusiasm for plants and the plant sciences. His studies led to publications on such varied topics as programmed cell death, senescence in the day lily, tissue culture and tissue printing – on which he coauthored a text with Rafael Pont-Lezica. He worked also on leaf abscission and the use of “fast plants” in teaching. He had a gift for collaboration – with his students and with colleagues here at Smith, the University, and elsewhere. These interests did not stop after retirement – in 2003, as a new member he talked to the Out But Not Down club on fall color change in plants and the following year served that group as president. A 2009 page of amendments to his résumé lists, among other items, an article on the History of the Food and Drug Administration written with his son Taylor.

Among his various awards and honors, in addition to the Harrington Chair, were election as a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1994, and an appointment as Katherine Asher Engel lecturer in 2002. Beyond the college, he

Memorial Minute for Philip Reid
Read by C. John Burk, Faculty Meeting April 25, 2012

2

maintained an active membership in the Northeast Section of the American Society of Plant Physiologists, also serving that organization in various capacities, including president. All told, he was a remarkable individual – recognized as an excellent colleague and over the years, for many, a good friend.

At his memorial service on April 14, many of Phil’s unique qualities as a human being were remembered, in particular the recognition that he was a kindly and gentle soul who was devoted to his family, to his garden, to golf and to the natural world in general. Many of us also knew him as a lively, witty conversationalist (in the good modern sense of the word). A keen observer of human nature, he was appreciative of the ironies, and contradictions that enliven academic life. He almost always had a good story or anecdote to share and one found oneself saving up something similar to share with him. Since his death, I’ve found myself in more than one instance thinking that “this is something Phil Reid would have appreciated” or “I’d certainly would have liked to have heard Phil’s views on this”... and then realizing as I did so that this was yet another of the ways he would be remembered and at the same time missed. He leaves his wife, Cathy Hofer Reid, and two children, Taylor and Alana.

C. John Burk
April 24, 2012