

## MICHAEL S. BIRD 1941 - 2003



*Michael S. Bird* was born on June 6, 1941, in Belle Plaine, Iowa, a place he loved to say was "so small that it would have been proud of traffic congestion." From childhood, he was characterized by puckish good humour and a strong intellectual curiosity. Undergraduate studies first in physics, then in cinema, art and literature led him eventually to religious studies. In 1975, he received his PhD from the University of Iowa. (For six years, he had measured the highway miles from Waterloo to Iowa City in Oreo cookies, a lifelong addiction.)

Michael was a professor of Religious Studies and Fine Arts at Renison College, University of Waterloo for thirty-four eventful years. He was eternally busy with projects on art, religion, culture, architecture, music, metaphysics, film – or some combination thereof. He was rarely in his office, for he loved the chaos of

working in the heart of things, most often in the College Great Hall, surrounded by people.

His courses were always eclectic, and his students loved them and him. Together they learned what it meant to study sacred places, take journeys, quests and pilgrimages, investigate religion and art, labyrinths and mazes, religion and film. A wonderful example of Michael's tireless commitment to teaching happened just this summer. Frustrated by the lack of a good text for his Art and Society course, he decided he had to write it himself. By the time he was meeting his classes, six weeks later, he was ready with a 240-page manuscript for the students.

One of Michael's greatest passions was to study and collect folk art (especially Pennsylvanian German *fraktur*), but he was equally passionate and knowledgeable about film, literature and music, architecture and furniture design, and the cinematic work of Ingmar Bergman. He published extensively on all these topics. He was an original thinker and a magnificent writer.

Many people got to know Michael through his involvement in the arts, both as patron and as amateur curator. Over the years he organized innumerable art exhibitions (complemented by interpretive remarks or comprehensive catalogues) in Canada, the United States, Germany, and England. He was an energetic friend, inspiring colleague and vociferous supporter of the Joseph Schneider Haus Museum in Kitchener. His superb folk art collection was donated in large part to the Museum where it will be enjoyed by the public for many years to come. Through the

gallery at Renison College, Michael championed contemporary artists in show after show, painstakingly organized and advertised. He was a dedicated friend of culture and creativity, past and present.

His own creativity was often best expressed at the piano. He couldn't read music well, but that never mattered. He was a natural jazz musician, and he loved to improvise. And now he is gone – the musician, the punster, the author, the teacher, the colleague, the curator, the friend, the husband, the parent, the man.

Michael Bird was exceptional. He was of average stature, but his generous spirit loomed large in the lives of everyone. Michael loved life and lived it fully every day he was granted. To his wife, Susan, and their daughter, Sarah, he was a gift. Few people are loved as completely, and it will take a whole village to fill the void in their lives. Michael was all about love and joy and laughter. Now there is only a great silence that they must learn to fill as he would have wished.



### Joan Robinson

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Joan Robinson, wife and companion of the **Right Rev.**

**Bishop Morse Robinson**, Renison College Honorary Senior Fellow, former Chancellor and founder of the Renison Institute of Ministry. A service to celebrate her life was held at St. Mark's Anglican Church, Niagara-on-the-Lake.

### Betty Graham

Renison College Honorary Senior Fellow and Patron of the "*Working Together - Building Our Future*" Campaign, Betty Graham B.A., M.A., Dip in S.W., M.S.W. recently passed away at her home in Toronto. Betty committed her life to the well-being of children and her career culminated with her appointment as Director of Child Welfare, Ministry of Community

Services, Ontario. In 1976, Betty was awarded an Honorary Degree of Sacred Letters from the Faculty of Divinity, Trinity College, University of Toronto. Betty committed her talents to many of her favourite causes, including volunteering her time to raise funds for the proposed Rev'd Dr. Florence Li Tim-Oi Centre at Renison College.