



Robert Mason

July 4, 1927 - February 4, 2011

Corvallis native Robert G. Mason, emeritus professor of statistics at Oregon State University, died of natural causes Feb. 4, 2011, at Corvallis Caring Place. He was 83.

He was born July 4, 1927, to Earl G. and Gladys Weatherspoon Mason at Good Samaritan Hospital, and attended Harding Elementary School, the local middle school at what is now Central Park, and Corvallis High School.

For two summers while in high school, he worked for the U.S. Forest Service, primarily as compassman and lookout in the Foley Ridge area of the Willamette National Forest. The nation was at war, and available able-bodied men were scarce.

CHS allowed 17-year-olds the option of leaving high school early for enlistment or higher education, and Bob chose Oregon State College (now OSU). When he turned 18, he enlisted in the U.S. Army, serving with Headquarters Company of the 1067th Engineers in the occupation of Japan, stationed at Kyoto. His tour of duty, which ended with an eye injury, is chronicled in his 2007 memoir "My Stretch in the Service."

After recovering, Bob resumed his studies at OSC, working in the newsroom of the Barometer, where he noticed a quiet, tall girl his friends said he should get to know. They dated; when Suzanne Cockeram transferred to the University of Oregon to pursue her journalism degree, Bob bought what he would later call "that miserable Chev" so he could see her on weekends.

When Bob finished his bachelor's degree in agriculture and Sue likewise

graduated, they were married Jan. 14, 1951, in Yoncalla, leaving immediately for Madison, Wis., where Bob earned a master's degree in agricultural journalism, and then to Ames, Iowa, where he worked in ag extension information.

In 1953, Bob was named ag experiment station editor at OSC, and they returned to Corvallis, where, among his publications, Bob launched the quarterly magazine Oregon's Agricultural Progress. He later earned a doctorate in communication research at Stanford University, and completed a year's post-doctoral studies in the philosophy of science at Princeton University.

Bob spent the rest of his academic career in the Survey Research Center at OSU, conducting public opinion surveys - including policy-changing studies for the Internal Revenue Service, the American Bar Foundation, and on the state of the City of Corvallis - and writing journal articles and book chapters on survey methodology and the ethics of survey research into his late 70s.

In his middle years, Bob successfully fought a development across the road from his family farm near Jefferson, aided in his 10-year legal battle by 1000 Friends of Oregon. The effort to preserve Hale Butte from subdivision took Bob twice to the Oregon Supreme Court, and cemented the authority of the statewide land-use development code. The lawsuit had national land-use ramifications.

Bob served on the Corvallis Budget Commission and the original and independent Committee for Citizen Involvement, and was until recently active in land-use issues in Benton and Linn counties. His activities in land use included helping found Friends of Linn County and the Goal One Coalition. He was an early and constant force opposing development of northwest Corvallis acreage through a group now known as Friends of Witham Oaks.

Bob's health issues included Alzheimer's disease, which clouded his memory of recent events without robbing him of awareness of his past, his family, friends or his surroundings. Indeed, those who came to know Bob Mason during his months at the Corvallis Caring Place enjoyed a sharp, outgoing and

humorous man, rather than the reserved scholar who sometimes walked in such deep concentration past friends and family that he failed to notice their repeated greetings.

He paid attention when it counted, encouraging his daughters in spirited dinner-table debates while pounding in his belief that life was theirs to lead regardless of their gender. Bob's passion for fairness and ethics led him to create the Mason Prize for Integrity and Moral Courage, an award to be given through the Spring Creek Project of OSU as it might be occasionally earned by academicians resisting pressure to stifle their scientific discoveries.

Bob and Sue just celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. Bob is also survived by his daughters, Nancy Mason Vandell of San Ramon, Calif., and Laurie Mason of Corvallis; and son-in-law Clark Vandell and grandson Perry Robert Vandell, also of San Ramon. He was predeceased last July by his brother, Roger Mason, his only sibling.

At Bob's request, no immediate service will be held; however, a celebration of his life in late spring will be announced for family and friends. Family suggests contributions be made, directly or in care of McHenry Funeral Home, to Corvallis Caring Place, 750 N.W. 23rd St., 97330, with "Bob Mason" in the memo line, or to one of the above-named land-use organizations.