

Robert Panara (1920 - 2014)

Obituary

Panara, Robert F.

Henrietta: (1920-2014) Teacher, Writer, Poet, Baseball Fan

"My classroom is my stage"

Rochester: Passed away peacefully on July 20, 2014 at age 94. Predeceased by his beloved wife Shirley. They were married for 56 years. Survived by his sister Eleanor Lynch of Atlanta; his son John and wife Janis; grandson Bill Panara; granddaughter Erin Lugo and husband Jarrod; great granddaughters Annabelle and Natalie, and students and friends across the international Deaf community.

Bob grew up in the Upper Bronx area of New York City. He graduated from De Witt Clinton High School, Gallaudet College (now Gallaudet University), and [New York University](#). He also received honorary doctorates from MacMurray College (1985) and Gallaudet College (1986).

He was a professor at Gallaudet University from 1949 to 1965. In 1967, he became the first deaf professor at the newly-established National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) at Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), founding the English Department and the NTID Drama Club. Bob retired in 1987. His teaching and writings inspired his students, many remaining in contact with him over the years. A renowned poet, his classic, frequently-performed poem, "On His Deafness" won first place in the World of Poetry contest. Professor Panara was also a founding member of the acclaimed National Theatre of the Deaf.

In honor of his trail-blazing role in theatre, literary studies, Deaf Studies, and deaf professorship in a hearing university, the Rochester Institute of Technology/National Technical Institute for the Deaf named its theatre the Robert F. Panara Theatre in 1988.

A 1975 recipient of the RIT Eisenhart Award for Outstanding Teaching, his passion for teaching and theatre was matched by his love for baseball. For four decades he was often seen with family and friends cheering on his favorite team, the Rochester Red Wings. When Bob was ten years old, and recently deafened by meningitis, his father arranged for him to meet Babe Ruth, who asked him how he was doing and shook his hand--an event Bob enjoyed relating to friends for the eight decades that followed.

His family will receive friends on Thursday 2-4 & 7-9 at Miller Funeral Homes, Inc. (3325 Winton Rd. South) corner of Winton and Jefferson Rd. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Robert F. Panara Scholarship Fund or the Shirley M. Panara Fund, NTID, 52 Lomb Memorial Drive, Rochester, NY 14623. A Special Memorial Tribute in his memory will be held on Friday, September 12th at 4PM in NTID's Robert F. Panara Theatre.

Published in Rochester Democrat And Chronicle on July 23, 2014