



A MEMORIAL

to

ROBERT C. "BOB" YOUNTS

Miami Director Emeritus of Aviation Services

March 2, 1932 - July 25, 2007

On the day Bob Younts died, he was doing exactly what he wanted. Like every other afternoon at four o'clock, he and his wife, Shirley, were enjoying a date...in their own way. At home, they'd prepared drinks and set them on the table alongside pens and identical copies of the local paper's crossword puzzle and turned on the XM Radio to the '40s music channel. The first one to finish could brag about the win to family and friends until the next day's rematch.

And Bob enjoyed plenty of both — family and friends. They were so dear to him that he walked away from a career as a commercial pilot to spend more time with Shirley, his wife of 52 years, and their sons, Steven and Philip. As the boys grew, he became involved in each of their activities — Little League baseball, the Talawanda Jazz band, and the golf team. Eventually the Younts family expanded to include Steve's wife, Amy (Witt), a 1982 graduate of Miami; Phil's wife, Denise (Winner), a 1986 graduate of Wright State; and three grandchildren, Caroline, Alison, and Trent.

Known for being funny, direct, and unassuming, Robert Chester Younts was born March 2, 1932, in Connersville, Indiana. His father, Leslie, worked in a factory. His mother, Mina, stayed home to raise Bob and his older brother, Bill. They lived simply. The house had no indoor plumbing, and it was often Bob's job to haul the coal into the cellar to stoke the furnace.

The Eagle Scout's love of flying came from his first ride in a Piper Cub at the age of fourteen. A barn-storming pilot was giving rides from a field on his grandfather's farm near Brookville, Indiana. From that point on, Bob knew he wanted to be a pilot and came to Miami University on an Air Force ROTC scholarship. Earning a Bachelor's in 1954 and a Master of Arts in 1962, Bob liked to kid that the best thing Miami had was indoor plumbing. He was the first member of his family to graduate from college.

What Miami didn't have was Shirley Ann Huber. Growing up in the same small town, they first knew each other even before they started grade school—through Sunday school. They became true pals in first grade and stayed friends throughout school. After attending the high school senior prom together, the friends became sweethearts.

They continued dating during their freshman year of college, although he was at Miami and she studied at Purdue University. Bob returned to Connersville most weekends to work. He never slacked off, pumping gas at a service station, working in a department store, and holding jobs at Miami as well.

With such a busy schedule and hundreds of miles between them, Bob and Shirley lost contact. That changed during the summer after their junior year when Bob began writing Shirley from AFROTC camp in Columbus, Georgia. The dating started again and continued throughout their senior year. After a year of working, they married in 1955, packed their worldly belongings into their station wagon, and drove to Greenville, Mississippi, for Bob's basic flight training. After six months, he received his wings and was then stationed at Lake Charles Air Force Base in Louisiana with the Strategic Air Command.

He served in the Air Force as a pilot flying C-47s and C-119s, among the last of the propeller planes. His duty was relatively quiet as those were non-war years. With his service completed, he returned to Connersville to teach six years as a junior high school industrial arts teacher and to fly charters evenings and weekends from the local airport. At this crucial point in his life, he decided to leave teaching and to apply for and accept a flying position with TWA. As much as he looked forward to the future prospects with the airline, he was concerned because he did not want to be away from his family during the long stretches that commercial flight demanded.

After only two months with TWA, he accepted a flight instructor position at Miami University in 1964. He later assumed the title Director of Aviation Services. As a flight instructor, he was very proud to have taught flying to Joe Ralston, Miami class of 1965. Joe went on to become an Air Force general, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Commander of NATO. Bob also taught both of his sons and Miami President Paul Pearson, who soloed under Bob's tutelage.

Being the University's head pilot, Bob flew four Miami presidents during his tenure and many famous people, including comedian Bob Hope, who nicknamed him Orville Wright. Among the many other well-known people who occupied his passenger seats were Deliverance author James Dickey, Miss America Susan Perkins, Martin Luther King Sr., and astronauts Alan Shepard, James McDivitt, and Neil Armstrong as well as the USAF Thunderbirds. He also experienced flying the Goodyear blimp.

When people heard about the astronauts, they usually asked Bob whether he had been intimidated to take the controls when they were on board. Bob's answer? They might know how to fly their own craft, but they didn't know as much as he did about flying his Aero Commander. Nobody intimidated him, no matter how famous. After all, he wanted to get home just as safely as any of his passengers.

Bob also never hesitated to tell passengers — professors to presidents — that they wouldn't be flying because of poor weather conditions. He knew the weather better than anyone, and no amount of prodding from a delayed passenger wanting to get the wheels off the ground could make him move if the weather was bad on the way to their destination. He firmly believed that most small-plane pilots' accidents were caused by people who "had to get there." Never once did he have a serious flying incident.

Always the teacher as well as the pilot, he enjoyed showing others how to navigate by railroads. Sometimes when there was an empty seat, Shirley would go along. She liked to rate his landings. That was probably Bob's doing since he often pointed out that flying wasn't about the arrivals but the landings.

When he wasn't in the sky, he enjoyed playing golf and was a regular at the Oxford Country Club. While he steadily improved, he was never good enough to beat Shirley. But how he loved trying. He also loved walking, scouting out the latest news around campus and uptown and reporting back to his early-morning coffee klatch at UDF or McDonald's. Ironically, he didn't drink coffee. During those 7:00 a.m. daily gatherings, he nursed his orange juice as he entertained his buddies with his storytelling.

On the flip side, he didn't suffer fools, had no use for cell phones, and offered no pretensions. If there was a job to do, he didn't waste time looking for someone else to do it. The airport's grass needed mowing? He did it. The plane's oil had to be changed or the plane washed and waxed? Again, he did it. Nothing irritated him more than somebody saying, "It's not my job." It helped that Bob could do just about anything with his hands, being an excellent carpenter and good with electronics. He even finished their home in Oxford.

After Bob retired as Miami's Director Emeritus of Aviation Services in 1992, he continued part time at Physical Facilities and flying the Aero Commander until 1997. He was active in the Oxford United Methodist Church, the Cincinnati Hangar of QB, the Warren Masonic Lodge in Connersville, and the Indianapolis Scottish Rite. His devotion to community was publicly recognized in 1989 by Miami when he proudly accepted the Alumni Association's A.K. Morris Award for participating in alumni activities far beyond the requirements of his regular duties.

Retirement also allowed him more time to tool around in his four-wheeled pride and joy, a 1968 convertible gulfstream aqua colored Mustang with the license plate number 12 MU, the tail number from the Aero Commander. Its radio was always set to "Bob music," a.k.a. Big Band music.

His son Steve, a 1982 graduate of Miami and Director of Global Strategic Sourcing for Hollister Inc. in Chicago, now has the Mustang. Phil, a 1983 graduate of Miami and a 1987 graduate of The Ohio State Dental School, is a dentist in Cincinnati. Both sons and their families regularly joined their parents on family vacations, traveling widely, from San Francisco to Disney World where they celebrated Bob and Shirley's 50th wedding anniversary in 2005.

Bob and Shirley, who is retired from Miami's Zoology Department, were as close as any couple can be. Bob may have espoused the popular adage, "In sickness and in health, but not for lunch," but his late afternoons — and his heart — always belonged to Shirley.

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