

## **GOODBYE OLD FRIEND**

**By Jim Wyant**

It seems rather ironic that on March 14, I spoke at the MASFAP Conference about Bob Berger's impending retirement.....and now, only a few weeks later, I am eulogizing him. But as fate would have it, Bob did not make it to his planned retirement date of June 28—a date that is still marked on my calendar to attend a dinner in his honor at St. Joseph. I still feel I should celebrate that date in some way, so it will remain on my calendar.

In speaking of my friend of over 25 years, I can't think of much that hasn't already been said by all of Bob's many friends and colleagues. You only needed to attend his memorial service to realize how many lives Bob had touched and the differences he had made in the financial aid profession and beyond. Bob leaves a legacy of accomplishments such as his influence on the design of the federal and state student aid programs, development of the state, midwest and national financial aid associations, mentoring and training many new financial aid professionals and supporting countless high school counselors not to mention the hundreds of students he helped to financially attain an education over the past 30 years.

Although I say farewell to my old friend with a heavy heart, I will always remember all the good times we had and all the trips we made together. Over the past 25 years, we spent many hours traveling together to Des Moines, Columbia, Jefferson City, St. Louis and many other parts of the country to attend conferences, board meetings and training sessions. Our discussions ranged from how financial aid "should" be administered to deer hunting and harvesting specialty grass seed on his St. Joseph farm.

Bob was certainly one of the most caring and sincere individuals I have ever known. However, it certainly was not beneath him to have good fun at others' expense. But he never passed up a chance to make fun of himself—the only fault he had was not being wise enough to avoid having his picture taken. Those pictures too will be part of his legacy that we can laugh about for some time to come.

I recall a discussion Bob and I had from several years' ago of a poem that was published in the NASFAA Newsletter entitled "To Those Who Wait." After reading it he jokingly commented, "You know, that will be me some day." And sure enough, he may have been right—read it and come to your own conclusion:

### **To Those Who Wait**

He stood before the Heavenly Gate  
his face was worn and old.  
He stood and waited for his fate,  
acceptance to the fold.  
"What have you done, "Saint Peter said,  
"to gain admission here?"  
"I've been a financial aid administrator

for these many years.”  
The Pearly Gates swung open wide,  
Saint Peter rang the bell.  
“Come in and choose your harp my friend,  
You’ve had your share of hell.”

So many things come to mind that I will miss with Bob’s passing– tagging along with him at MASFAA and NASFAA conferences and having him know practically everyone we met; hearing his standard comment “ you’re exactly right” to almost every statement you made; waving at me from across the room as I entered the dining hall at every conference, indicating that he had saved a seat for me.....but most of all I will miss his unconditional friendship.....”Goodbye Old Friend.”