

FAREWELL TO BILL SCHWEERS

Jorge Vélez

C. William (Bill) Schweers passed away on September 26, 1999. One of the most active and prolific practitioners of ESL on the island, Bill was very well-known in the Puerto Rico TESOL community and beyond. As a tribute to him, we would like to tell you about his life and his contribution to the teaching of English in Puerto Rico.

Bill Schweers was born in Houston, Texas in 1942. He was raised in various parts of the United States since his father's work and business interests required frequent moves from one place to another. He obtained a B.A. in Sociology from Occidental College in Los Angeles (1965), and an M.A. in Anthropology from Northwestern University in Illinois (1969). During the years he was studying at Northwestern, Bill had the opportunity to work as a research assistant for noted anthropologist and writer Edward T. Hall.

Bill began his travel adventures by joining the Peace Corps (1965) and teaching English in Gabon in French Equatorial Africa. After completing his masters, he taught English in Barcelona in the mid 1970's. While in Barcelona he served as ethnographic consultant and interpreter for Expedición Africa 2000 to Cameroon and Chad, a project of Radio-Televisión Española (1976).

Wanting to establish himself in a place that offered him a bit of cultural exoticness, security, and stability, Bill arrived and settled in Puerto Rico in 1977. He started his own language school where he taught individual and small group classes in English, Spanish, and French to members of the business community and the public at large. By 1987 he had begun to teach at UPR-Humacao, and three years later he joined the faculty of UPR-Bayamón. In the

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meantime he had initiated his doctoral studies with New York University (at Sagrado Corazón), which he completed in 1993. During those years, Bill also taught part-time in the NYU-TESOL program and in the Columbia University American Language program.

But this chronology does little justice to Bill Schweer's contribution as a scholar and educator within the ESL field in Puerto Rico. Upon joining the UPR-Bayamón English department, Bill immediately made his presence felt. His drive and enthusiasm spread throughout the department; soon teachers found themselves undertaking initiatives well beyond the classroom—doing research, making presentations at international conferences, and publishing articles in local and international journals and newsletters. Bill was always there to praise any meritorious efforts and demand higher levels of excellence. Through his intervention, Carol Numrich and Miriam Eisenstein came down to offer workshops to the department. Bill also spearheaded a major revision of the Basic English course offered through Educational Services, and he was feverishly working on a new textbook for that course when his illness finally incapacitated him.

Outside the confines of UPR-Bayamón, Bill found time to serve as *TESOL-Gram* editor for two years; serve on the board of SCAPR; work with Angel Villarini as trainer and consultant in integrating critical thinking into the ESL program of the Department of Education; found and preside over the fledgling Language Planning Association of Puerto Rico; publish articles and reviews in *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, *Language Quarterly*, *TESOL Journal*, *Language Problems and Language Planning*, *TESOL Matters*, *TESL Reporter*, and the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* (in press); organize panel discussions and symposiums on themes relevant to the teaching of English on the island; and make numerous presentations on and off the island. As his health declined, Bill made every effort to see places that he had longed to visit. And so in recent years he traveled to Japan, Egypt, Ireland, the Galapagos Islands, and India.

Teacher, scholar, mentor, and writer; a lover of gourmet food, pristine nature, stray dogs, far-away places, and warm fellowship—Bill Schweers was one of those people that you had little choice but to notice and admire. He will be very sorely missed.