Robert Eugene Helbling

May 6, 1923 ~ November 11, 2015

A noble companion, teacher, mentor and friend left us suddenly on the morning of November 11, 2015, at the age of 92, due to heart failure.

Robert was born in 1923 in Lucerne, Switzerland. After his undergraduate schooling and required service in the Swiss defense forces he was hired by a distinguished chemical works company and became a junior executive. He went on to be the trade representative for the company to countries in Europe and Africa.

Due to the urging and necessity of his family already here, he emigrated to Salt Lake City with his mother a few years after the Second World War.

In 1956, Robert met Suzanne Ottinger, a beautiful and cheerful woman who soon became his loving bride.

Robert was promptly accepted as a graduate student and teaching assistant in the Languages department at the University of Utah, and after subsequent years of teaching went on to obtain his PHD in German Lit. (with Russian/French allied) at Stanford University in 1958.

Returning to the U. of U., he quickly advanced up the ladder. As a full professor, he became Director of the Honors Program (1964-1967) and chair of the Department of Languages and Literature (1965-1977), as well as helping to guide many others in their academic agendas.

In the 1970's, he was instrumental in setting up an intensive summer program for the study of Arabic language and culture in Tunis, Tunisia, funded by the U.S. State Department. He was also active on many national-level educational and humanitarian panels.

He received many prestigious regional and national honors and distinctions as an educator, including the 1986 American Association of Higher Education's designation as one of fifty faculty members in the USA, "giving extraordinary educational leadership on their campus."

He was also a highly respected administrator, lecturer, author and co-author of several seminal works and articles in English, French and German. He was a primary and continuing force in the creation and flourishing of the original "Intellectual Tradition of the West" curriculum at the U. of U., which still thrives to this day (with a wider scope) as a cornerstone of the Honors College. As a lifelong committed teacher, his students regardless of their class level-freshman to post-graduate-were always individually important to him. After many decades in education, he fully retired at age 75 to enjoy his wonderful domestic surroundings. He loved music and nature-naturalness-the harmony and peace of open and quiet space.

Robert is survived by his beloved wife of almost 60 years, Suzanne Ottinger Helbling, and many nieces and nephews in America and Switzerland.

In lieu of flowers, the family encourages donations to the University of Utah and the University Hospital. A commemorative ceremony for family and friends will be held at Larkin Sunset Lawn Mortuary, 2350 East 1300 South, Salt Lake City, on Tuesday, November 17, at 11:00 AM; viewing at 10:00 AM. Private interment will take place at Mount Olivet Cemetery.