

# Robert B. McGinnis

*October 19, 1927 — February 22, 2001*

Robert B. McGinnis, of 3 Strawberry Lane, died peacefully on a day spent with loved ones in the wonderful setting of Hospicare. The son of Dorothy Abercrombie McGinnis, Bob attended high school in Oakland, California and served in the United States Marine Corps in the Pacific theater of World War II. Upon his discharge, he deposited his sidearm in a canal, and later chose golf clubs and intellect as his weapons of sport and societal impact.

He entered San Francisco State University after the War and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree with Honors in Sociology and Psychology in 1950. He was awarded a Master's Degree in Sociology from Stanford University in 1951 and a Ph.D. degree in Sociology from Northwestern University in 1955.

Professor McGinnis served as an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Florida State University from 1953-55 and at the University of Wisconsin from 1955-57. At that time, he pursued academic specialties in statistics, research methodology, and family. He also served as the Director of the Sociology Research Laboratory at Florida State, and completed fellowships in mathematical and statistical applications at Stanford and Berkeley.

Promoted to Associate Professor at Wisconsin in 1957, he was an Editor of the *American Sociological Review*, published a book, *Selected Studies in Marriage and the Family*, and published numerous papers on family issues. He became a full Professor of Sociology at Cornell University in 1961. He and his son drove from Madison, Wisconsin to Ithaca in an Alfa Romeo Spyder at a time when small sports cars flashed their headlights at one another in passing. Bob took great pleasure in racing the Alfa at Watkins Glen in the early 1960s.

Professor McGinnis made significant and lasting contributions in three areas of sociology. First, he was an early champion of the application of rigorous quantitative methods of sociology, working tirelessly to create a more useful, rigorous social science at Cornell and in the larger world. In 1961, the American Sociological Association approved a new Section on Methodology, as the result of efforts organized by him and colleague, Albert Reiss. His 1965 book, *Mathematical Foundations for Social Analysis*, broke new ground in providing mathematical language for modeling social behavior. His influence on the development of quantitative methodology is also reflected in his election to the founding editorial boards of *Sociological Methodology* in 1969 and *Sociological Methods and Research* in 1972.

He was a remarkable research innovator and entrepreneur. During the 1960s, he secured major grants for research training in social systems analysis, first from the Office of Civilian Defense and then (with Robin Williams) from

the National Institute of Mental Health. This program exemplified his strong interest in graduate research training with substantive sociological content. By 1969-70, McGinnis was principal investigator in no fewer than six major research and training programs.

Second, Professor McGinnis, long interested in social mobility, developed what became known as the Cornell Mobility Model, a sophisticated stochastic model for the study of social mobility. This model found application in his research on the careers of scientists, his third important contribution. Beginning in the 1960s, he conducted a series of studies on the utilization, training, and mobility of scientists and engineers. This led to the establishment of the Research Program on Social Analyses of Science Systems in 1973, with funding from the National Science Foundation, and the National Institutes of Health. The program resulted in numerous influential publications, many of which challenged orthodox positions in the sociology of science, and trained a generation of quantitatively sophisticated graduate students. Though Professor McGinnis' own beliefs were clear, his students were encouraged to strike out on their own. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Society for Social Studies of Science, and hosted its first international meeting, held at Cornell in 1976.

Besides his intellectual contributions, Professor McGinnis was an institution builder. In his most recent and perhaps greatest legacy to Cornell, he founded and led the Cornell Institute for Social and Economic Research, now a thriving institution serving all Cornell social scientists.

Upon retirement, he relished spending winter months at his home among the sunny people and beaches of Anguilla in the West Indies, and warmer months in travel with his wife, and at golf with his son, Kevin, and close friends.

Bob is survived by his wife, Mary, who retired as Coordinator of Cornell's CIVITAS Program. He is also survived by his sons, Kevin, of Hallowell, Maine and Brian, of Stockton, California; and a daughter, Meaghan, of Campbell, California. He is also survived by stepchildren, Steven, of Cranston, Rhode Island and Kristina, of Chelsea, Vermont; a granddaughter, Sarah; a grandson, Samuel; and several step-grandchildren.

His many friends and colleagues sorely miss his presence and treasure his memory.

*Steven B. Caldwell, Robin M. Williams, Jr., Donald P. Hayes*