

This quarter Iowa State, and especially its programs in writing, lost a good friend. We who studied or taught with him are blue at his passing, better for his example.

Albert Walker joined the English faculty in 1935, headed the department from 1959 to 1973, and was appointed Professor Emeritus in 1977. He taught us what he could of the importance of students, the humanity of literary study, and the power of writing.



A year or so ago in his living room, he had been talking of Shakespeare and students and writing and Duke Ellington—all with his usual insight and love. Toward the end of the evening, he moved to the piano where a classical nocturne lay open on the rack, but what he played was his favorite blues, “Trouble in Mind.” He had learned it back in the forties from his friend, Big Bill Broonzy.

On the second chorus Albert sang, and the lyrics took on a trembling as his voice reached down for the positive core which he knew was inside all true blues:

“I’m gonna say to you ‘Goodbye fare thee well’  
But I won’t be blue always . . .  
The sun gonna shine in my backdoor someday.”

When he finished, he had peeled away the song’s sadness, had shared the life and hope at its heart. He did the same for literature in the classroom, because he was that kind of a man. We’ll remember warmly.

Charles Sohn,  
for the students  
and friends of

Dr. Albert Walker