EMERITUS PROFESSOR ROBERT A. BOAKES
1967 TO 2014 AND BEYOND

"I released my last two pigeons, the 'dolphins' I had first trained in 1978."
It was written of his beloved Debussy that his charm does not lie in a forthright statement of harmony and melody, but rather in a vague and elusive succession of harmonic progressions. It may similarly be written of Bob that his character does not lie within a definable dimension, but rather in a fantasy of vague observation, apprehension and comment. That he consciously simulated Debussy and Picasso – the father of his philosophy – is doubtful, but the comparison cannot be overlooked. A typical picture is that of Bob, dressed in the style of his contemporaries, the Beats, sitting in the window of Room 8 against the sunset, a copy of Proust in his hand and the soft mysticism of “Prelude à l’Après-midi d’un Faune” gently tinting the atmosphere.

His efforts to lead a material life are almost invariably amusing. In the Autumn of last year he
bought a share in the ill-fated Ulysses and endeavoured to adopt himself to the task of controlling its patient machinery. In spite of traversing roundabouts, eliminating petrol pumps and being informed a multitude of times that in England one drives on the left, he could never bring himself to realise that, vaguely romantic though its name may appear, the choke is of less importance to the conducting of a motor-car than are the more commonplace steering wheel and brakes. He has been known to catch a bus going in the opposite direction to his own, with no better excuse than that he didn’t notice that it was, and when asked for his fare, to produce it in saving stamps.

Academically brilliant with an assured future, Boakes is a restless, disturbed character. He believes that he revolts against the apathy and conservatism of the world today, but his instructive vagueness leaves him wondering why he revolts and to what end. He lives in the dreams and visions of the modern painters, but he is not contented. He will abandon Proust half read, has rarely demanded of the art sections of the local libraries and invariably goes to sleep during a performance of Debussy. He recently found himself an ideal companion capable of keeping even Bob’s head beneath the clouds, but it appears that she will not hold him for long, as indeed none of her sex have ever done. The one thing he is assured of in his own mind is that he is capable of writing better English than anyone else at Tyntesfield, and he ascended to the position of Editor of this Year Book on the unproven strength of his claim.

We have no fears for Bob as he invariably floats away unscathed and usually unaware from any dangers that penetrate his realm of fantasy. Possessed of unlimited good humour and quite clearly harmless he will be popular wherever he goes.

A piece written about Bob by his fellow students at Tyntesfield College circa 1960
HARVARD UNIVERSITY, PHD 1967
It is always shocking to hear that a colleague you have always regarded as a “young fellow” has retired. It is even more upsetting to learn that his retirement was almost 8 years ago. But I am delighted to hear that Bob Boakes is being honored with a festschrift. Bob’s book From Darwin to Behaviourism: Psychology and the animal mind is right at the top of my list of recommendations to students and colleagues – even though, as a (more or less) good behaviorist I should deplore the last word. Bob Boakes has been a wonderfully productive and eclectic behavioral scientist. He is one of the great success stories of Memorial Hall. I hope he is enjoying his retirement as much as I enjoy mine.

With all good wishes,
John Staddon

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Bob Boakes retired! I remember Bob arriving at Harvard while I was a grizzled third-year graduate student. Although we of course interacted about behavioral psychology what I remember most is our discussions of fiction, including that of John Updike and, later, his recommendation of British authors. Later in our careers we both studied observing behavior in which Bob made one of his many seminal contributions. My wife Stephanie and I enjoyed visiting him in England and Australia (where his Sydney office was five times the size of my La Jolla office… I noticed). And our daughter Ramona learned from him in Sydney as well while studying there for a semester (and attending yoga classes with Bob’s wife).

Perhaps Bob’s retirement is a reminder that all good things end (including large offices). But very gradually in Bob’s case. Thanks Bob for your contributions and for the privilege of knowing you.

JOHN STADDON

ED FANTINO
Hi Bob,

It’s been so long. I remember very little from our years at Harvard. One thing I do remember. I was reading through a Penguin History of England and came across the expression, “As every British schoolboy knows,…” followed by some historical fact or other. I said to myself, I actually know two British schoolboys, you and John Staddon. So I asked you about it, but neither of you had any idea of what I was talking about.

The time I remember best was around 1966 when Nahid and I and our two-year-old daughter took an around-the-world trip, paid for by an advance on an introductory book that was never written. We visited you at Sussex where you were very kind to us, and we stayed at Stuart Sutherland’s beautiful house on a crescent. We went to Brighton, and I have a picture of you, me, Mary, and our daughter, all sucking our thumbs. It’s in color, now very faded and indistinct, and unscanable – like my memory.

Nahid and I are talking about another round the world trip, this time sans two-year-old. We think of it as a continuation of the last one, interrupted by a couple of years. We will go in your direction this time and hope to see you. Have a great festschrift!!

Howie

HOWARD RACHLIN
My first graduate teacher

My first day in grad school I walked into my cubicle shared with another grad, and introduced myself. He had a lovely accent and I asked where he was from. “Cambridge” he said. “Oh, perhaps at the end of my four years at Harvard, I’ll have a bit of your lovely accent”. Bob stared at me for a moment, and then said “Cambridge, England”. I asked what he was working on. “A dither” he said. “A zither?” I asked. He explained that a dither was a device like a wheel with eccentric loading that was designed to add noise to a system to keep gears from sticking and such. Now I had learned my second fact in graduate school. (1) not all Cambridge accents are equal; and (2) not all noise is bad. I asked what gears he was trying to keep from sticking. He paused, took a deep breath resigned to get little work done, and explained how Don Blough had devised a way to display IRTs on an oscilloscope, and saw some intriguing banding; but to see what was going on you had jiggie the positions a bit to keep the dots from overlapping. I learned a third fact: all graduate student research in those years was unconventional.

Decades later I went on Sabbatical to Cambridge. My first day there I walked into my cubicle shared with another Sabbaticaler, and introduced myself. In a lovely accent that I now recognized as Cambridge-sub-England, he replied, “Bob Boakes”. I learned many things from Bob there as well; but the margins will not hold it all.

Peter Killeen
In the autumn of 1965, I began my first teaching job as a lecturer at the brand new Department of Experimental Psychology at the almost equally new University of Sussex, beautifully set in the South Downs outside Brighton. Our newly-appointed professor was the eccentric and charismatic Stuart Sutherland, who founded one of the most lively and innovative British psychology departments of the time. Sussex was an exciting place to work. Stewart knew an impressive range of trans-Atlantic psychologists; his persuasive powers and the attractions of the new University meant that we had a constant stream of visitors bringing with them new and interesting ideas.

Early in 1966 Stuart, who liked to keep us on our toes, announced that we would soon be joined by a formidably industrious operant conditioner direct from Skinner’s lab in Harvard. This caused me at least a twinge of alarm. But, of course, this ideologically pure Skinnerian Stakhanovite existed only in my imagination. Bob, when he arrived, proved to be a delightful and interesting colleague who taught all of us much about operant techniques; in particular he soon weaned me off rats and mazes and onto pigeons and Skinner boxes. Bob and I became intrigued by the effects of non-contingent reinforcement and also the characteristics of errorless discrimination learning. Herb Terrace was one of the American visitors to the department. Another was Leo Kamin, whose studies on ‘blocking’ were causing a great deal of interest; though Leo spent much of his time in Sussex developing his case against Sir Cyril Burt. (There was no shortage of topics for discussion at that time in Sussex!). Bob and I realised that these topics were linked by the concept of inhibition (anathema to an orthodox Skinnerian), but increasingly popular in a wide variety of contexts.

With considerable temerity, we decided to hold an off conference on inhibition and learning. We sent invitations to present papers to many leading figures in the field. We were astonished by the response; we soon had a list of most of the best known workers in the field. We realised that the important theoretical issues related to the interaction between classical and instrumental conditioning - to use the terms current at the time. This made it essential to include among our contributors workers from the Pavlovian tradition and, in particular, those associated with Jerzy Konorski. Once again we were lucky in attracting a number of East European contributors including
Konorski himself, though he was unable to attend the conference.

The conference was to be in April 1971. Everything was prepared and appeared to be going swimmingly. Then in late January Britain’s first national postal strike began and all normal postal services ceased for seven long weeks. This was in the days before email and even faxes were considered exotic. At this late stage we were not to be deterred and somehow, I do not remember the details, we managed to get all the conference material together in time. It was successful and enjoyable and was eventually published in book form by Erlbaum, however, it was certainly a skin of the teeth achievement.

As a postscript I should mention the conference which Bob and Tony Dickinson organised as a memorial to Konorski in 1978. By this time my interests had moved on from animal learning, but I did help with some of the organisation. Jerzy Konorski had died in 1973 but, in writing a short piece about his life, I had discovered that he had a brother who had emigrated to London; a search of the telephone directory revealed that there were only two Konorskis listed, and a call to the (promisingly) Hampstead number put us in touch with this brother. He was delighted to be invited as a guest of honour to the conference. When he arrived he caused quite a sensation; he was strikingly similar in appearance to his famous brother, including the broad-brimmed eastern European hat. There were a number of people who were completely taken in and, for a short time, Bob acquired the reputation for raising the dead. Hail Bob, the resurrection man!
Most of my interactions with Bob occurred while we were running the animals in our experiments. The running room was communal. One of its walls was fitted with chambers that contained the experimental chambers. Much of the floor space was occupied by the racks that held relays, timers, tape readers that controlled the presentation of events, cumulative recorders, counters, and print out counters. Each of the staff members (Bob, Euan MacPhail, Sebastian Halliday, Keith Oatley) and the DPhil students (myself, Tony Dickinson, Richard Morris, Fred Toates) had at most two chambers and the equipment needed monitoring as there were so many parts that breakdowns were common. As a consequence, we spent a considerable amount of time each day in the running room, putting animals into chambers, removing them, recording the data from the previous session and starting the next one. We also spent a lot of this time talking about the data as they were coming off the recorders and counters as well as a range of issues in experimental psychology, mostly related to learning, memory, and motivation but also general questions about brain-behaviour relations, computational models of motivational systems, particularly feeding and drinking. This environment was one that is not likely to be repeated: the staff were a few years older than the DPhil students; they were just out of their PhD, and typically ran their own experiments, as the days of large grants were yet to come. The running room environment was intellectually stimulating; I learned more about experimental psychology and the business of doing research than at any other time in my life. The broader environment of the Laboratory of Experimental Psychology (as it was then called) was also extremely stimulating. Each day, all the members of the Laboratory as well as those from the other departments in Biological Science (Zoology and its sub department of Ethology was next door to Experimental Psychology), would congregate in the common room for morning coffee and afternoon tea where our discussions continued and new ones started. There were numerous seminars each week and visitors were common (for example, Kamin, Jenkins, and Terrace). On many evenings (we worked until 1800 h), Bob, other members of staff and some of the DPhil students would go to the pub just off the campus for a few beers and lots of gossip. Parties were common and I recall being envious of Bob who excelled at dancing (Rock and Roll, rather than the psychedelic type).
My recollection is that people got on well and had fun in each other’s company. One indication of this is that I was once sick and stayed home for a few days. Bob, Tony Dickinson and Richard Morris turned up at my place to see if they could snatch me back from death’s door with a bottle of whisky: it worked and I am most grateful to Bob for this as well as much else.

I’m alarmed to discover that, long as I have known Bob (well over 40 years), I cannot recall any significant episode of indiscretion, slap-stick, or whatever. I’ve only really had one major collaboration with Bob when we jointly organised a memorial conference for Jerzy Konorski at the Sussex in 1977 (the proceedings were published in A. Dickinson & R.A. Boakes (Eds.) Mechanisms of Learning and Motivation, Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1979). Using his aptitude for historical research, Bob discovered Konorski had a brother who had emigrated to the UK before the war, which led him to a single ‘Konorski’ entry in the London telephone directory. On ringing the number, he discovered that it was for Jerzy’s said brother, invited him down for the opening talks, and sat him down in the front row. However, it turned out that the brother was effectively Jerzy’s identical twin, much to the initial dismay of the speakers who had known Konorski personally (Zelinski, Rescorla, Wagner etc) - the shocked recognition on their faces was a sight to behold accompanied by the fleeting thought that Bob did in fact have transcendental powers.
Bob’s first job (a close call).
The scene: Stuart Sutherland’s house in Brighton.
The date: Summer 1967 (I think?)
Dramatis personae: Stuart Sutherland: the head of the new psychology department at the new University of Sussex.
Bob Boakes, who has just been offered a lectureship by Stuart in his department.
Nick Mackintosh, just passing through.
The time is early evening, and we are waiting for dinner. Stuart is getting impatient because he hates dinner parties, and wants to have time to go out to the pub after dinner. But we are waiting for a phone call from Mary, Bob’s wife. She has been in London and is catching a train to Brighton, and will phone to tell us when she will arrive.

The phone rings. It is Mary, and she speaks to Bob, who says he will drive to station to meet her. Stuart interrupts to say that he will go to meet Mary since he knows his way round Brighton better than Bob. Off he goes (in time for quick visit to pub before meeting the train).

Nearly an hour later, phone rings; it is Mary again who says she has arrived, but there is no one to meet her and she will take a taxi. Shortly thereafter, Stuart arrives home cursing and swearing, to say that there was no sign of Mary at station. He is interrupted by arrival of Mary in her taxi. It turns out that she had got off at an earlier suburban station in Brighton rather than the main station.

We sit down in rather strained silence to a delicious, if slightly overcooked, dinner, at rushed conclusion of which Stuart disappears to pub. It is lucky that Bob had already signed the contract for his lectureship.
I started my PG studies with Bob at the University of Sussex back in 1980. I found him to be a warm and welcoming supervisor, but my time at Sussex passed so quickly, and I have a hopeless memory.

Probably the only stand out memory was when I told him, in my second postgraduate year, that my wife, Yvonne, was expecting our first child. While most people greeted the news with “That’s fantastic. Congratulations!”, Bob said “Oh! Well enjoy the next few months because after that your life will change for ever!”. Always the realist; and he was right.

We took our newborn son, Duncan, to Bob’s office for their first encounter, and Bob’s attempt to entertain the lad was to retrieve a stuffed crow (like a prop from a Hammer Horror film) from the top of his bookcase and wave it at the baby, while cawing. Fortunately, Duncan suffered no lasting emotional trauma, and last year achieved a distinction in his MSc Animal Welfare course. We don’t think the events are causally linked.

I’m really disappointed that I cannot attend the Festschrift, but I hope all goes well.

My first contact with experimental psychology occurred in August 1988, when I was asked to attend an interview for the MSc in this subject at the University of Sussex. I was met by a very congenial fellow - Bob Boakes - who then went on to expose my almost complete ignorance of experimental psychology in a most disarming manner (with the able assistance of George Mather). Somehow they must have detected a favourable quality (or at least that I could pay the fees) as I was offered a place and arrived in Brighton later that year to study for the MSc. Many of the faculty at Sussex were not easy to forget. On my first class I was asked rather rudely by the convenor who I was, and so I asked the question back. In no uncertain terms it was made clear to me that I was a hopeless imbecile for not knowing that this was Professor Stuart Sutherland. I soon settled in and much enjoyed the lectures on animal learning, leading me to do my Master’s project with Bob. Bob has a very kind manner for providing what could in other people’s hands be devastating feedback. I was told ‘to get my cigarettes and smoke’ in preparation for the assault. This was the first time anyone had really provided me with detailed analysis of why I was being unclear, non-specific, unstructured, etc, etc in my writing.
After my masters Bob and I went our separate ways. He went to Aus and I went on to do a DPhil with Martin Yeomans at Sussex. At the end of the DPhil I had organised a post-doc with Michael Cabanac at Laval, but at the last minute it all fell through. Back to looking for a post-doc I contacted Bob in the faint hope that he might have something and through his unsurpassed social network he put me in touch with John Prescott. Through John I both came to join CSIRO and out to Australia. Seeing Bob again was good as he was a familiar and kindly face amongst strangers and we started to collaborate. Ultimately this led to me working with Bob as a research associate at Sydney. This has to have been some of the nicest time I have spent working in academia. It combined intellectual rigor with a beautifully relaxed atmosphere – and we produced some of the best work that I have been involved with. Bob took the time again and again to provide ample feedback on my shortcomings as a writer and scientist, a process that enabled me to improve far beyond what would have been possible if I had stumbled along on my own. In fact the generally open and supportive ambience that Bob created amongst his lab members – and indeed his general approach to post-docs, research assistants and students – has been a model, which I still strive to emulate.

I took a post at Macquarie after working with Bob and went from the pleasure of just pursuing research to the rigors of teaching, administration as well as trying to follow ones research interests. Bob’s mentorship now kicked into a higher gear, with help and collaboration on many articles and grants, and in navigating academia. He spent a lot of time giving me feedback and advice much of which I have tried to heed.

It is now over a quarter of a century since I first met Bob. He has been a solid friend, and the most magnificent academic mentor one could hope for. When Ben asked me to provide this piece, I felt I couldn’t give a specific incident or anecdote – there wasn’t one – just years and years and years of kind and intelligent support. Anything I have achieved in academia has been in no small measure due to Bob – and Bob you truly deserve the titles of Professor and Magister.
I first met Bob when he visited Sydney Uni prior to his permanent move to Australia in 1989. I was, of course, aware of his work, particularly his book from Darwin to Behaviourism — a title that was much caressed by the learning theorists in Sydney at the time — and although Debra and I left for Cambridge shortly afterwards, it was time enough to get to know and like him and to invite him to our post-wedding celebrations at the Excelsior Hotel (which he attended with an attractive entourage). I also had time enough to discover how appalled he was by the requirements for graduation with honours from the Psychology Department at Sydney. The main issue was, I think, not the theoretical thesis in and of itself but the more or less implied requirement that it critique contemporary psychology from the perspective of the Sydney realism of John Anderson and his students — notably John Maze. Off to Cambridge and, in the fullness of time, I completed my PhD dissertation focusing on incentive learning and its role in goal-directed action. Bob seemed like a natural candidate to serve as an examiner and, although it may have been a welcome invitation initially, the full horror of the task must surely have dawned on him shortly after receiving the finished article: I had taken it as my duty to straighten out some of my supervisor’s curlier ideas regarding the intentionality of animal action, and the discussion section of my thesis was the ground on
which the battle between an intentional and a realist psychology was played out. Whether or not Tony Dickinson’s views deserved those criticisms, Bob probably didn’t deserve the task of reading them. But read them he did and I can clearly recall my own horror to see he had taken the opportunity to prepare many many pages of questions and comments and that the thesis itself was bristling with post-it notes. During the course of the oral defense it soon became clear that most of these were targeted at the discussion section. Fortunately Nick Mackintosh had had enough by the time we got that to that point, was looking for a long deserved drink, and called a halt to proceedings before Bob could exact his revenge for, by then, 3 years of realism. I have never had the courage to ask him what he made of that final chapter and I doubt I ever will.

The day I met Bob Boakes for the first time I was wearing a tartan lab coat and playing a confectionary kalamazoo. The tune was ‘Scotland the Brave’. Not really out of the ordinary for a day in my life however it is a measure of the man that this incongruous introduction did not stop him employing me and taking me on as a student for the best part of the 1990s. Bob’s presence is intractably wedded to this time in my life and it is only now, when asked to reflect, that I can fully appreciate what an influence he had. During that decade Bob and I weathered the loss of parents, the joy of new loves and the general highs and lows of existence. All fuelled by cigarettes in Badham courtyard and beer in the Flodge. Ten years later cleaning out his office we laughed at the number of experimental designs written on beer coasters.

It is only now that having supervised students of my own that I realise even part of what Bob has taught me. He has taught me patience with people who are difficult. He has taught me the usefulness of the Oxford comma. He has taught me how to balance on the fine line between supervisor and friend. He has taught me how to do this with grace and good humour. And although it sounds slightly weird, he gave all us Antipodeans the gift of Fred Westbrook. Directly or indirectly Bob challenged my thoughts and broadened my horizons.

ANNE SWINBOURNE
I teach at a regional university at the top end of Australia. One year not that long ago, in the very early morning, I stood on the Charles Bridge in Prague with 5 of my PhD students who all were giving talks at an international conference there. It was foggy, quiet and we were the only people there. It was magic. These young women were all first generation at university. They grew up on cane farms. One turned to me and said “Look at me and where I am”. At that point I got it. I understood Bob’s enthusiasm for people who want to learn and his patience with those that have a story to tell. And to you Bob, I say thank you for that gift amongst the many you have given me. It is rather wonderful.
Firstly, I’d like to say a great thanks to Bob for inspiring me to further study in general (and animal behaviour in particular). I’d never have become the academic who is writing this had it not been for his example and encouragement.

Picking a good story to tell about Bob is far from an easy task, as so many of us have been exposed to the same “Bobbisms” (in a reflection of constancy of his manner over many years – and as an aside, has anyone else wondered where he has stashed the ever aging portrait a la Dorian Grey…?). For example, I’m sure most of Bob’s students have at some time had the critical point of a meeting (or lecture) entirely overshadowed by visual spectacle of an incongruous pairing of dress shirt/shoes with cycling shorts. Just as all of us that have worked for Bob must have shared the burden of keeping him away from the lab knowing that the mind that is so keen in designing experiments on paper somehow conspires to confound their performance in practice.

As I think about the aspects of Bob I’d want the story to reflect, I’m left with vivid sense of intellectual curiosity and rigor allied to a generosity that is sometimes a rare commodity in academia (at least I think it was a selfless act when Bob encouraged me to quit my PhD with him in favour of a place at Cambridge, I guess he could simply have been ridding the lab of a troublesome presence …).

And so to San Sebastian for the 2013 SEPC meeting, where Bob arranged dinner at one of the (several) Michelin-starred restaurants in the town for his contemporaries. I can’t speak to what occurred that evening, but the next day, all Bob could talk about was the food, and all John Pearce could seemingly remember was the price. In dining, as in the lab, Bob’s enthusiasm shines through!

DOMINIC DWYER
On Prof. Boakes.

As will be evident from the contributions of others in this collection, Bob has had many roles in many people's educations, careers and lives: A lecturer and tutor in undergraduate years; supervisor during an Honours project; advising on a post-graduate Thesis; a collaborator in post-doctoral research projects; a career mentor; a Faculty colleague; a friend. Some of us, including myself, have been lucky enough to have had all of these.

My own relationship with Bob began with an Honours year research project. I had returned to University after working for a few years in recruitment to learn more about Psychological assessment and organisational Psychology. I quickly learned that the field was, to put it nicely, rather undercooked. Nevertheless, I applied to enter the Honours program and, to my relief, was assigned to work on a research project with Bob in Learning. He and I spent the next year examining the renewal effect in extinction in appetitive conditioning.

Not only was this experience where I learned to love the complexity and rigour of comparative psychology, but this is also where I first came into contact with a few choice phrases that I still use with my own students. The IPG. *That's an idea that might best be explored as a PhD project.* "I don't have the equipment for that, but I'm sure you could build it yourself." "Could it be done more simply?"

Bob's mentoring was extended when he helped me attend my first Scientific Conference to present the results from my Honours research project. I flew around the world to Almeria, Spain for the 10th Congress of the Spanish Society for Comparative Psychology. And it was here that Bob introduced me to vital Academic skills – how to network, how to chat with senior researchers from around the world, how to go out until 3am with other delegates and still make the first session the next day. It was here also that Bob's curiosity and sense of fun on full display when he decided to give his conference presentation entirely in Spanish, even though he was still barely conversational in the language. Then again, perhaps it was merely a new way to prevent Geoff Hall from asking him questions.
And now, even following his official retirement, we can see that Bob is still instrumental in the lives of young scientists. Some 12 years later, I travelled to Spain again to attend another Congresso to present data from my own laboratories. And Bob was there as well with a different young student who was preparing to present her data from her Honours research project. And there he was, helping her make her first steps into a full academic life.

I met Bob shortly after he came to Australia, when he was supervising a PhD student working on anticipatory vomiting. I facilitated their collaboration with the RPA Hospital cancer clinicians. Bob came to know of my work, and encouraged me to apply for a Chair position when it was available, at the School of Psychology. If Bob had not encouraged this, I may not have been aware of the position, nor applied for it. So I directly owe him my current academic position, and my continued and much enjoyed place within the School.

Bob has always been very much “himself”, with little regard for complying with popular expectations. For example, he rode into work long before cycling became fashionable. He has always dressed casually, even when Head of School. He says what he thinks. He also has a great sense of style, not least in his choice of a partner. He and Margi are a very “cool” couple. Their house is stylish and modern, full of beautiful art and unconventional spaces.
My first memories of Bob were in the lecture theatre – stimulus, reinforcement, reward and, of course, punishment. The delivery was gentile, and very English, while the content engaging. Although always comfortable in the lecture theatre, though, it was clear that the lab and pure science were his true loves. Even supervising third year projects Bob was always keen to get a handle on the data, even when gathered by rank amateurs with numbers no doubt sometimes conjured from thin air.

For an Honours supervisor, I was drawn to Bob not for his vast academic record, nor for a love of Behaviorism or a desire to spend six months watching skinny rats run in wheels day and night – it was nothing more than the man himself. He showed genuine interest in the progress of all his students and belief in them, no matter how talented or not they were. For me that care continued for the six years I was honoured to have him as an undergraduate and post-graduate supervisor under those gently guiding hands.

It was also Bob’s fault that I ended up in the wine trade. Having survived the rat labs he suggested that postgraduate research on wine tasting might be a good option. And he was right, again. Not only was it a fertile field for research but it also set me on a life long path – something that I will always be grateful for. That said, the broader lessons from my time with Bob, including research expertise, the joy of knowledge and an understanding of the benefits of quality supervision, have greater meaning and are rare treasures that I carry with me each and every day.

ANGUS HUGHSON
Am not really sure what to say about Bob. I know I would not be where I am today without him. I began honours with no intention of continuing to a PhD, no plans to pursue a career in research, but that changed when I met Bob.

Thinking back to my years working with Bob in the animal house, I remember his enthusiastic ‘Good morning’s, I remember sitting in the prep room, me, in my grubby lab coat, Bob, with his worn leather riding gloves, looking over the daily numbers with fresh anticipation (wheel runs, food consumed, lever presses or flavor drunk). His excitement and fervor were contagious – I really didn’t mind the weekend work, or those couple of nights I slept on the floor in the lab to take rats out of running wheels at 2am.

It is only now that I’ve experienced academia in several other schools that I realise how extraordinary Bob was. His motivation, his passion and his ambition were only for science. It wasn’t about recognition, the publications or grants. It was about discovery, it was about advancing knowledge, it was about understanding behaviour.

Bob remains one of the few people I know who are true scientists at heart.

I hope to one day be to others what Bob has been to many students and colleagues, and what he was to me – an inspiration.

MELISSA BAYSARI
I have Bob to thank for many things, including sparking my interest in experimental psychology in the first place. I began working as a research assistant in his lab as a teenager, not long after finishing high school. At the time, Bob was investigating flavour learning and evaluative conditioning in humans. As I remember it, my main tasks were to clean out spittoons and measure countless hand-drawn marks on visual analogue scales. There were also occasional opportunities to express some creative flair, for instance creating a photomontage of Prof. Boakes as Shakespeare for a party invitation (I didn’t attend the party but I gather Bob the Bard was a hit). I cherished this lowly RA job, at first simply because Bob and the others I worked with were such friendly open-minded people. But at a time when I was wilfully disinterested in everything, my fascination with Bob’s learning research grew as I came to appreciate what it was actually all about.

It may be hard to believe, since he is such a pleasant and jovial person, but Bob actually had a curious knack for selecting the most disturbing aversive stimuli to present to unwitting students in his evaluative conditioning experiments. These usually took the form of extremely graphic images of diseased flesh or intensely bitter food additives, though the occupants of every floor of the Griffith Taylor building will remember the day Bob brought in a jar of decaying shrimp paste that had been hiding for years in the back of his fridge to use in an odour learning study. I still suspect we were actually the intended subjects for that experiment. Fortunately, I failed to acquire an aversion to Bob. Roughly fifteen years on, we still work together (I no longer have to clean out the spittoons).

As has always been the case, Bob influences my thinking greatly and I call on his wisdom regularly. His contributions to intellectual life are clearly evident in the thriving lab group that we share and the great community of learning and behaviour researchers that has grown around him in the Australian Learning Group.
I first heard of Bob Boakes as an undergraduate student in a third year Learning & Behaviour course taught by Fred Westbrook. Fred was describing Bob’s very clever demonstration that pigeons could produce the same evidence for communication in problem solving that had been claimed for dolphins, but Bob showed how this could be more parsimoniously explained as a consequence of simple Pavlovian conditioning in the signaler and discriminated operant conditioning in the receiver. The next time I remember hearing Fred talk of Bob was a year later when Fred was complaining about that “fucking Professor from Sydney University” who had been in Fred’s lab over the weekend and had failed to follow protocol when using Fred’s special coffee apparatus. I was yet to learn how former students remain forever disrespectful to their supervisors. After that episode, Bob became our lab’s uncle, who hosted the weekly Australian Learning Group meetings in his large professorial office at Sydney University—and it was a good thing the office was large given the swelling number of participants, not to mention the uncomfortable presence of bicycle shorts slumped over the lip of a basin in the corner of the room.

Fast forward 12 years, when I took up my current position at Sydney University, as one of Bob’s colleagues. I owe this position, in no small part, to Bob. I still remember hearing Bob’s cheery voice over the phone during my interview. It was midnight for me in Trieste, and an equally shocking 9am for Bob and Ian Curthoys—in those days selection committees could get away with phone interviews with only two committee members present. But more importantly for my prospects, it was Bob’s work over the previous 12 years that had established a viable environment for learning research at Sydney University, and which has continued to flourish into the biggest (and definitely best integrated) research group in our School. I have had many fruitful and enriching interactions with Bob over the last 24 years, especially the last 12 years. But my greatest debt to Bob comes from his work to establishing such a strong, collaborative, and stimulating research community, both within our department and more broadly with his creation of the Australian Learning Group. It is a testament to his energy and vision that he, as an outsider arriving in Sydney 25 years ago, created the ALG and built it into such a successful and collegial group.
As one of the thousands of undergraduate students who sat through a Bob Boakes lecture on either learning or the history of psychology, of his many positive qualities the most striking was his enthusiasm. Subsequently, as his research student, it became clear that enthusiasm is too mild a term. What he seems to derive from his research and teaching is pure joy, and most of my lasting memories from my Honours and PhD are of the small manifestations of this joy. They are too numerous to recount here, but some are particularly salient.

On one occasion I was guiding him through a journal article I had read and he began cackling with delight over the phrase “pigeons were filmed using video cameras”, having interpreted this in a way clearly unintended by its authors. I’d missed the joy in the ambiguity of this statement, and I suspect most others would have as well. I also recall as a new PhD student giving a talk at the Australasian Experimental Psychology Conference and being mercilessly grilled by an audience member. Bob, sitting directly behind this audience member, grinned gleefully for the duration of the interrogation. I still don’t know what he was thinking but knew even at the time he wasn’t taking pleasure in my discomfort. Perhaps it was a lesson, conscious or not, that “smilers never lose and

Dan Costa

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Dan Costa
frowners never win”, especially when delivering an animal conditioning talk to an antagonistic audience. Don’t get flustered or annoyed, just enjoy it.

The joy he derives from his research is infectious, to the extent that I often walked into our supervisions meeting with what I thought were good research ideas, and walked out thinking they were rubbish but feeling good about the fact and with self-esteem intact. And notwithstanding his constant encouragement, he ensured that my ego was kept in check when, after my very first Honours experiment produced very good results, he was quick to assure me that this was beginner’s luck.

His notion of retirement puzzled me for a time: he still came into the office every day, gave lectures, wrote papers, applied for grants and supervised students. But in Bob’s case this made perfect sense: if retirement means being free of things you are obliged to do and replacing them with things you want to do, for Bob this entailed virtually no change, except for his surrendering of administrative duties. Back when ALG meetings were held in his office at the University of Sydney, on one occasion when setting up a laptop he had to deal with a notoriously treacherous power outlet, but noted cheerfully that if he was electrocuted someone else would need to take over as Head of School. He managed to relinquish his administrative duties as well as outlasting that power outlet, and continues to do what he loves with unabated energy.
Over the past fifteen years, Bob has been lecturer, tutor, employer, supervisor, and now colleague to me. But, all of these can be summarised into a single role: mentor, and an exceptional one at that.

As a mentor, Bob has taught me a huge amount about research and about life. The first time I met – or at least observed – Bob was when I was a first year student in 2001. Bob was lecturing learning and motivation to the large crowd of us ‘first years’ in Wallace. This was my first introduction to Pavlovian and instrumental conditioning – content that I found intriguing. But, I have to admit that it was his style of dress that stuck with me the most. I was amazed to learn that you didn’t have to wear ‘proper’ clothes if you were an academic, you could wear a t-shirt, shorts, and sandals to work! This was surely a good sign for a research career.

Over the next few years of my undergraduate degree, I had more and more interaction with Bob, culminating in him supervising my honours thesis. I remember nominating him to be my supervisor and being thrilled to find out that I had been allocated to him. I prepared thoroughly for our first
meeting, reading his and others’ papers, keen to impress him. When we first sat down to meet, Bob asked how I was. I took this as my cue and described all the reading I had been doing and which experiments I was interested in running for my project. When I had (finally) finished, Bob paused for a second or two and then said “But, how are you?”. This was another important lesson, that there’s always room for a friendly chat.

After honours, I decided I wanted to do a PhD. I was tossing up between Psychology and Public Health, but the decision was made fairly simple when I considered the pros and cons of each. Bob was in Psychology, not in Public Health. So, after making this decision, I was fairly devastated when Bob told me that he was retiring before I had even started my PhD. Who would supervise me now? Thankfully, Bob’s version of retirement was different to most others. He supervised me and many others since (supposedly) retiring and whenever asked about it he always responds “But, now I can finally say ‘yes’ to all the things I like doing [research] and ‘no’ to the things I don’t like doing”. This was one of the most important lessons he taught me, that academia is much more than a ‘job’.

Of course, there are many other lessons that Bob has taught me over the years, ranging from etiquette (e.g. how to bum a cigarette from Sally and get her to roll it for you) to matters of conscience (e.g. a sad face on a study protocol when I suggested using Mount Franklin water as a control drink…because it’s a Coca Cola company). And certainly not least are the many valuable lessons about how to conduct research itself, particularly about experimental design and the importance of an appropriate control group – lessons that have largely guided my interest in placebo effects and clinical trial design.

So Bob, thank you for all the support and advice you have given me over the years. I’ve learnt an enormous amount and have enjoyed every minute of it, which is entirely attributable to your unique combination of knowledge, humility, and humour.
Bob and I first met at the start of my fourth year (2005), when we chose supervisors for our research projects. He had listed all of his regular options and, of course, I knew about his expertise in those areas from previous undergraduate lectures, but there was one key word in there that was probably an afterthought for him: “Wine”. Bob was my first choice as a supervisor and, over the years since then, I’ve realised how fortunate I was to be allocated to him.

He had previously supervised Angus Hughson in a wine project and I had been involved in conducting one of Angus’ experiments in my third year. It was a lot of fun, but also intriguing, so I was hooked.

With the help of Bob, I managed to get the highest mark that I’d ever received at USyd for my fourth year thesis and realised that maybe I was actually alright at this research game.

The next step was being accepted to study my Masters by Research, once again with Bob as supervisor (complete with a very warm and congratulatory e-mail from Bob about being accepted), which we later upgraded to a PhD. I worked closely with Bob on that PhD for seven years. Whenever I talked to anyone about Bob being my supervisor, they would always smile and nod, before mentioning how fortunate I was to be working with him.

After a little while, he started asking for my help with statistical analyses for projects with his other students, which was a huge confidence boost. Then he asked me to help with a couple of reviews of taste and smell papers and commented on the thoroughness of my (probably overeager) reviews. He showed he wasn’t just interested in getting me through a research project, but in helping me to develop into a proper researcher.

Just after the PhD was submitted, I helped him move to a new office. As he went through his well-organised folders of paper, he found a box of wine-related articles and passed them to me – kind of a passing of the torch in a way. He said that I would most likely be the last student to do a wine research project with him. Geez, it wasn’t that bad was it? Still, it made me realise that the PhD isn’t just a challenge for the student, but also for the supervisor.
So thank you, Bob, for being the brightest of guiding lights for me. You may not have realised that your supervision and support had such a huge impact on my career, but I truly appreciate everything you’ve done for me. I promise I’m still working on that last wine paper!

Bob, I suspect you will be pleased that I don’t have any incriminating photos or potentially embarrassing stories to share. I would however like to thank you for helping me to settle into Sydney and the Department. At work, you’ve introduced me to interesting new colleagues, bright students and new areas of research. Outside of work you and Margi were among the first to have us to dinner and help us feel welcome in Sydney (and Patonga!). I’m glad you’re so active in your so-called retirement, thanks for everything!

LAURA CORBIT
Bob’s enthusiasm for research is a constant source of inspiration. In particular I admire how his passion translates to a meticulous attention to detail when planning and running experiments. A favourite story of mine is from a few years ago when we were planning to give rats yoghurt as part of a flavour conditioning experiment. I was ready to grab the first yoghurt I saw in the supermarket but instead was instructed by Bob to purchase four different varieties (after some deliberation on which brands would make the cut). For the better part of that afternoon Bob carefully planned and administered a series of (double-blind) taste tests to all of us postgrads, asking us to rate the viscosity, sourness, sweetness and creaminess of each. Bob then tabulated the results and chose the successful candidate (Paul’s All Natural). While this thorough work never received due credit in the resulting protocol – which Bob wrote from scratch in the 15 mins I was away getting coffee – it’s a memorable example of Bob’s dedication to his work and of what makes working with him so enjoyable.

During Honours, Bob would always come into the lab, and I was so worried that this was because he thought I was dodgy and felt that he had to check up on me, as rarely did other supervisors venture into the smelly halls that are South Badham. Over time I would learn that it was because he cared and was genuinely excited by the research process, not just some graph students would bring him. This tiny act of stopping by in the morning encapsulates so many of his traits: the morning minute to teach so willingly and patiently, answering any last minute procedural questions, the morning minute to say “Big day today!” on test days, his enthusiasm for research never waver,ing, and the morning minute to ask about life, a reminder that balance is important. Needless to stay, sticking around for a PhD was an easy decision.

Bob has taught me so many things about being a better researcher and has very much influenced the way I write (note the two spaces after each full stop). His insistence on protocols is such an effective way to think through an experiment, something I’m sure will stay with me long after this PhD ends. He tries constantly to get me to sample the (harmless) solutions we give to our rats, but I can safely promise you Bob, that this will never happen! I’d like to think that I’ve also
changed him, even if that only means that he has learnt to change the background colour on his powerpoint slides – his favourite ‘apricot’ taken from Justin, or getting him to pose like Ryan Gosling – a current movie star whose face is plastered all over 520.

I could not have asked for a better supervisor.
Notable alumni of Caius College Cambridge include William Harvey, David Frost, and Robert Boakes; but as all three had departed before I arrived, I never got to meet them there. Harvey and Frost have remained elusive, but for a time I became Bob Boakes, my first postdoctoral appointment being as a stand-in for him at the University of Sussex while he was away on sabbatical. He returned, bouncing with enthusiasm about the implications of something called autoshaping, to join a group that included Dickinson, Halliday, Pears, Mackintosh, Macphail (and the memory of Westbrook who had departed for a place called Kensington, which was somewhere unknown, but clearly not the one in London). Bob expanded our horizons (for example, none of the rest of us would have thought, as Bob did, to contact the Brighton oceanarium to look at the methods they used to train their dolphins). But he left us to go to Sydney (we had heard of that, although the distinction between UNSW and U of S remained unclear). I continued my stalking of Boakes, and went to visit in 1991. It was a different place in those days -- shortly after arriving I was asked my views on Andersonian direct realism (I didn’t have any). But I was not deterred, and I have been coming back regularly ever since. That Sydney (the Uni and UNSW) is now a Mecca for those of us studying learning and behaviour is thanks, in large measure, to Bob’s enthusiastic championing of the topic. Old South Wales may have its Gregynog, but for a beaker full of the warm (New) South we need to go to Bob’s ALG.
The main project Bob and I have collaborated on is Carrots and Sticks: principles of animal training. This book is for the general reader and illustrates how a student of learning theory can unpack almost any animal-training challenge. It would not have been possible had Bob not been so receptive to new information, even though, arguably, it was terribly close to home. The enthusiasm Bob brought to the project was incredibly refreshing because so many trainers think they know everything they need to know and so many theorists are only marginally interested in applied learning theory. Within minutes of meeting, Bob and I could both see how best to pick each other’s brains and write with a united voice.

Over my 30-year career, Bob is certainly the academic with whom I have most enjoyed working. This is because he is very quick to enthuse and very slow to judge. He genuinely accentuates the positive and happily ignores the negative. A gentleman and a gentle man, he allows mistakes and flabby thinking to prevail just long enough for the culprits to see the error of their ways. In this sense he is, of course, a great teacher.

While Bob’s crisp diction and understated chuckles certainly make phone calls with him enjoyable, it is face-to-face encounters that are a total delight. And when he turns up to a meeting and breaks the ice with his inadvertent impersonation of the absent-minded professor, I find myself smiling broadly and being extremely grateful that he’s around. I thank him for showing me how much fun an academic career can bring.
I began to be thrilled about psychology around 1987, when our History of Psychology Professor, Tomás R. Fernández, introduced us to this field. His work was focused on evolution and psychology, especially, not only in the obvious influence of evolution on behavior, but the contrary which is much more intriguing: the influence of behavior in evolution. We were engaged with these theoretical questions when we happened to know about the publication of a very nice book on this topic: From Darwin to Behaviorism: psychology and the mind of animals. A group of enthusiastic students devoured it because the mentioned Professor considered this book an outstanding contribution to the field of the history of psychology, to the point that he conducted a review of the book that was answered by Dr. Boakes himself. Both the review and answer were published in a Spanish journal (Anuario de Psicología, 1990, 44, 95-105). By then, we only knew about Boring’s (1886-1968) book but we did not know that book writers could also respond to our opinions! We were astonished by how enjoyable history of comparative psychology was when, at the same time, we had started to collaborate in experimental psychology of learning.

Surprisingly, we discovered that the author of that lovely book, in fact was not only a historian but a really relevant experimenter and that his curriculum covered (already at that time, let alone nowadays) almost any important topic in modern learning theory. When I first met him in one of the meetings of the Spanish Society for Comparative Psychology the most amazing thing was that I could not express my admiration for his work because he was impressed about mine (I had published just one paper). I discovered that Bob was a really nice man, passionate about his work but most importantly, willing to be passionate about the work of others. For a young researcher, like me in those times, meeting him was the definitive incentive that I needed to fall in love with animal learning.

In the meeting of Bilbao in 2008, Bob and I were the “invited artists” to entertain people in the final banquet of the meeting. He gave the speech in Spanish and I subsequently translated it to English (or nearly). I remembered that he started saying “He está en muchos congresos” and I translated: “He has been in many meetings, from Darwin to Behaviourism” (se non e vero e ben trovato).
Finally, I had the great opportunity to work with Bob in Sydney in 2013. I could realize that his style has invaded all the Australian Learning Group where you can see that Bob has collaborated with almost all of his colleagues engaged in learning phenomena.

Bernard of Chartres (s. XII) pointed out that, in the present, we can see more and further than our predecessors because we are standing on the shoulders of giants. I like to think that this is one of the characteristics of science and I am very proud of having met one of those giants. Thank you, Bob.

Ignacio Loy
University of Oviedo, Spain

KIERON ROONEY

How did we meet? We were put in contact by a mutual colleague – Assoc. Prof Gareth Denyer. Bob had contacted Gareth in June of 2009 as he was looking to see if anyone in the Biochemistry department was interested in collaborating on an equipment grant to upgrade some rat running wheels (I still have the emails so I have PDF’d them for interest). We met for a coffee and despite having very little else in common then, have subsequently co-supervised 5 Masters of Nutrition and Dietetics students (Anastasia Sheludiakova 2010, Carling Chan 2011, Candy Lin 2012, Winda Ekayanti 2013, Hayden Stewart 2013) in the “multi-disciplinary” research of behavioural and physiological consequences of sugar sweetened beverage consumption.

A relationship measured by University outcomes? In the past 4 years Bob turned a conversation over coffee, about outdated running wheels, into multiple post graduate student research projects, 5 published manuscripts (there will be a 6th when I stop dragging the chain) and in 2013 we were awarded an Australian Research Council Discovery Project Grant worth $480,000 for 2014-2016. Bob has successfully avoided full retirement for yet another 3 years.
A relationship by any other measure? Without doubt having met and worked with Bob has provided me an amazing opportunity for development both personally and professionally. The first thing I learnt from Bob was that one could retire from academia, yet still turn up to work every day. The second thing I learnt from Bob was that I could bring my own coffee mug to the University coffee carts – and get a discount! The most important change however, that Bob has inspired is that I no longer look at my results –in any of my research– from a purely Physiology/Biochemistry systems approach. The significance of the integration between behaviour and metabolism in providing understanding for the approaches with which we as a community need to engage, in aid of addressing the current non-communicable disease epidemics threatening our society cannot be ignored. I have Bob to thank for starting me on this more comprehensive and rewarding path of investigation.
BOB IN ACTION
THANKS BOB!
And thanks to all those who contributed to this book, especially Anne and Justin for helping to track down Bob's colleagues and to Margi for digging out the photos from Bob's albums.