

THE CALLAHAN
EFFECT

A Life Full of Yeses

Thirty-five years since he taught his last course at Holy Cross, legendary English Professor Edward F. Callahan continues to inspire generations of students. Alumni agree: If there were a Mount Rushmore of Holy Cross faculty, Callahan would be on it.

STORY BY
MARYBETH
REILLY-MCGREEN '89

Ask Bridget O'Connell Murphy '86 what she'd grab if her house were burning down and you'll get an unusual answer.

Along with the expected, her wedding album and her grandmother's ring, would be the 39-year-old English papers she'd written for Professor Edward F. Callahan.

Murphy shares images of a half-dozen papers, arranged in a fan: some dog-eared, one torn, one printed on that delicate onionskin typewriter paper favored in the 1980s. She took four Callahan courses, his legendary James Joyce seminar among them.

Of course, it's the papers' back pages that matter most, specifically the blocks of feedback, written in red and ending in the all-important grade. In them, Murphy is consistently praised for her thinking and organization, but Callahan's cursive is, at times, challenging to decipher,

requiring multiple readings. A sample:

"The choice of vividness of detail by the Herald [Herald?] justifies the length. Don't offer apologies for impatient, unintelligent people who demand all speeches be grunts or growls.

"Also try to be [squiggle, squiggle] of the need for precision of language, as is the Herald. You usually are."

Murphy laughs and then turns thoughtful: "They've made many moves with me. I don't know why I kept them."

The answer arrives a moment later.

"I want to remember all this. I want to remember that I could write like this at some point in my life," says Murphy, today a fundraising consultant. "And I want to remember that there was a very accomplished, very smart professor whom I admired and respected who gave me that feedback."

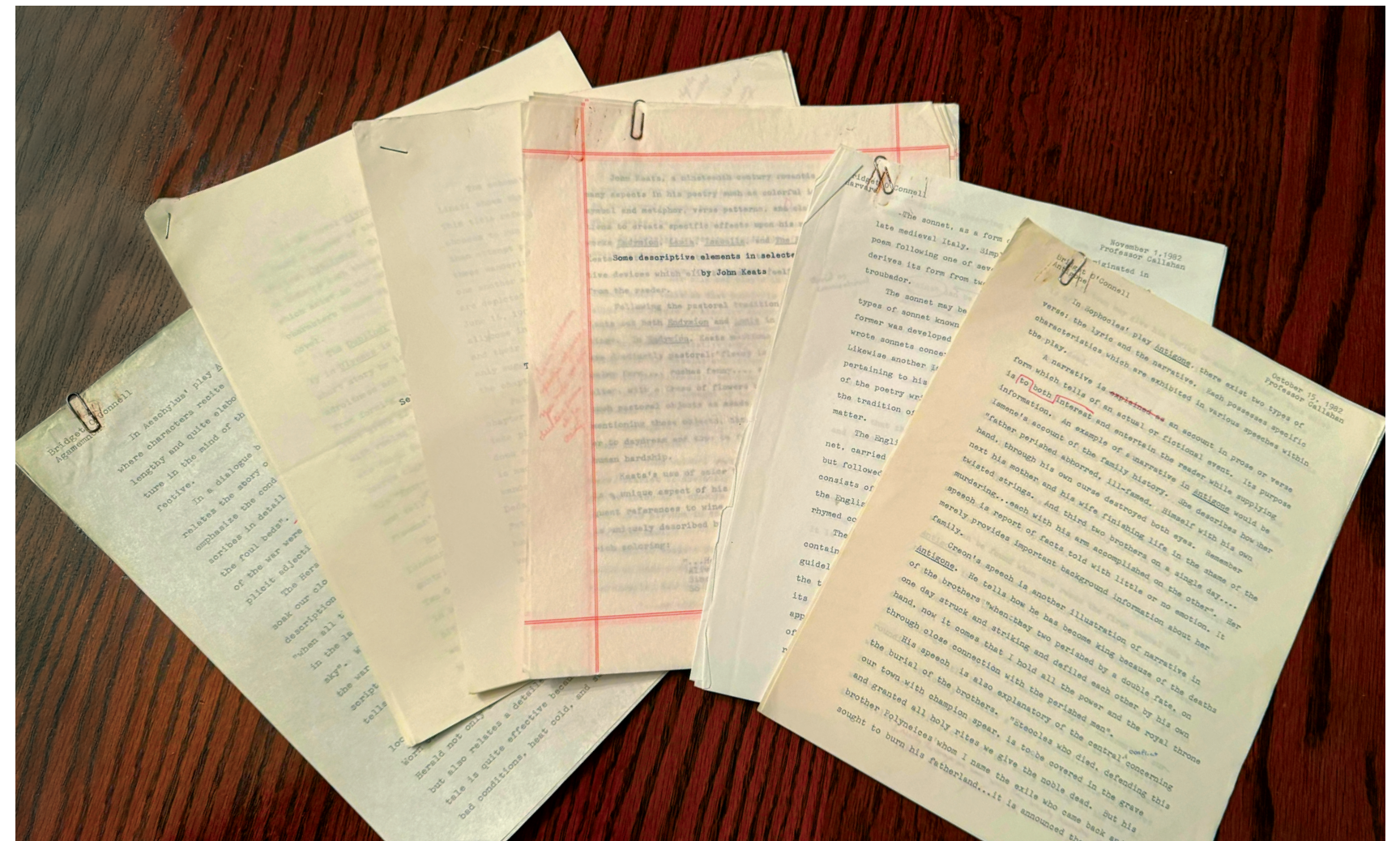
It's a common refrain among students of Callahan, whose Shakespeare, Dante and Joyce courses were legendary, a rite of passage and badge of honor for the serious English major. It's generally acknowledged in literary circles that to have read "Ulysses" is on par with having read "Moby Dick" or "The Riverside Shakespeare" cover to cover. And to have read Joyce at Holy Cross with Callahan, well, mic drop.

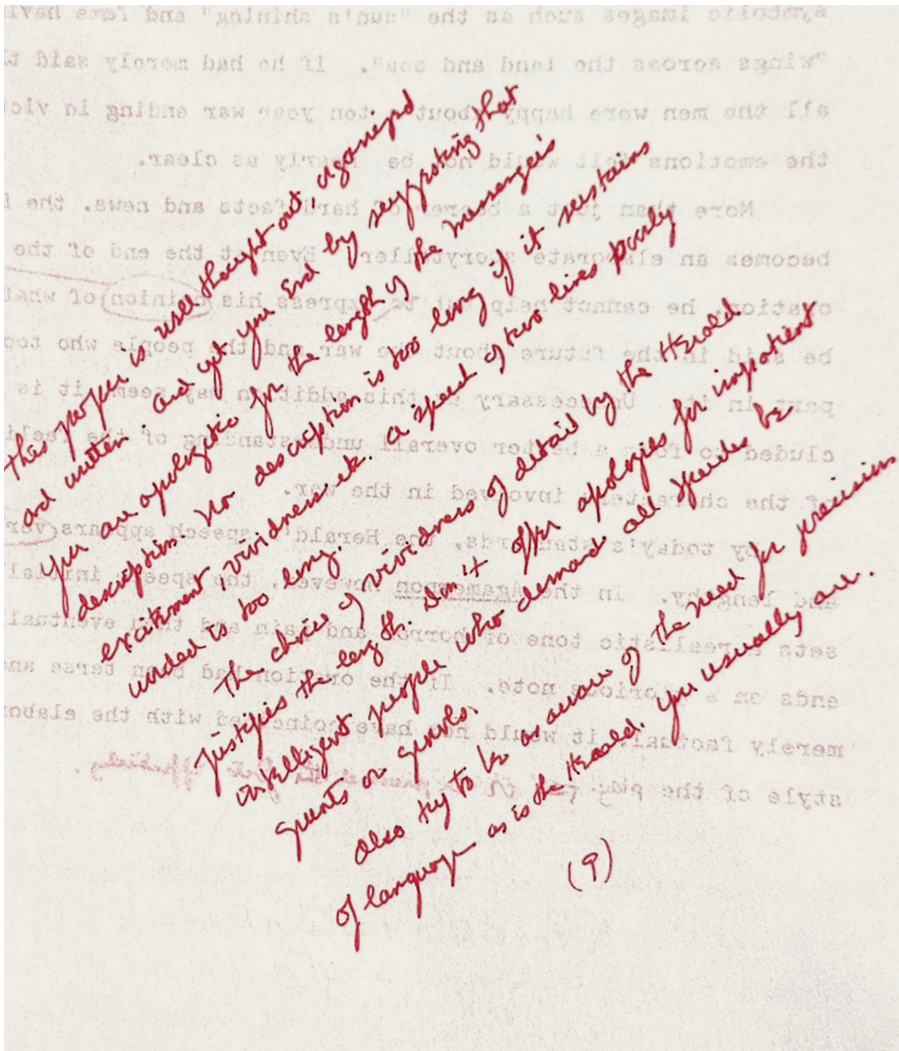
Callahan's former students, friends, colleagues and family tend to hold on to the papers, letters, notebooks, even the syllabi that tie them to the man, who, for 33 years, enjoyed the reputation of being one of the most popular and demanding professors at Holy Cross.

Callahan retired in 1990 and died in 2018, but his legacy endures for generations of former students, such as Murphy.

"He taught me that reading wasn't merely an academic exercise, but rather a way of engaging with humanity across time and space," Murphy

OPPOSITE (top) In his final year of teaching, Callahan, pictured here in his Fenwick office, won the Sears-Roebuck Foundation's "Teaching Excellence and Campus Leadership Award." Asked about his teaching philosophy, Callahan once said, "Don't take yourself seriously." **OPPOSITE (bottom)** Even decades after grading, papers graded by Callahan have made moves from location to location with their owners.





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BRIDGET O’CONNELL MURPHY ’86

says. “He showed me how to not just comprehend, but to commune with texts, to allow myself to be changed by them.

“He continues to influence how I read, write, speak — even how I engage with the world,” she continues. “His lessons transcended literature, teaching me how to observe closely, think critically, express clearly and appreciate deeply. This was the essence of Callahan’s effect: the remarkable ability he had to transform literature from something one studied to something one lived.”

“ROCKY, DON’T BE AN IDIOT ... THERE’S NO FUTURE IN BOXING FOR YOU.”

Born in 1925 and raised in Brockton, Massachusetts, Callahan hailed from a working-class Catholic family. Massachusetts’ sixth-largest city is known for two things in particular: manufacturing shoes and producing world-class boxing champs. What Callahan may have felt about shoes is lost to history, but his sons will tell you that even as a young man, “Ed,” or “Dward,” as his children called him, didn’t much care for sports. He had other dreams.

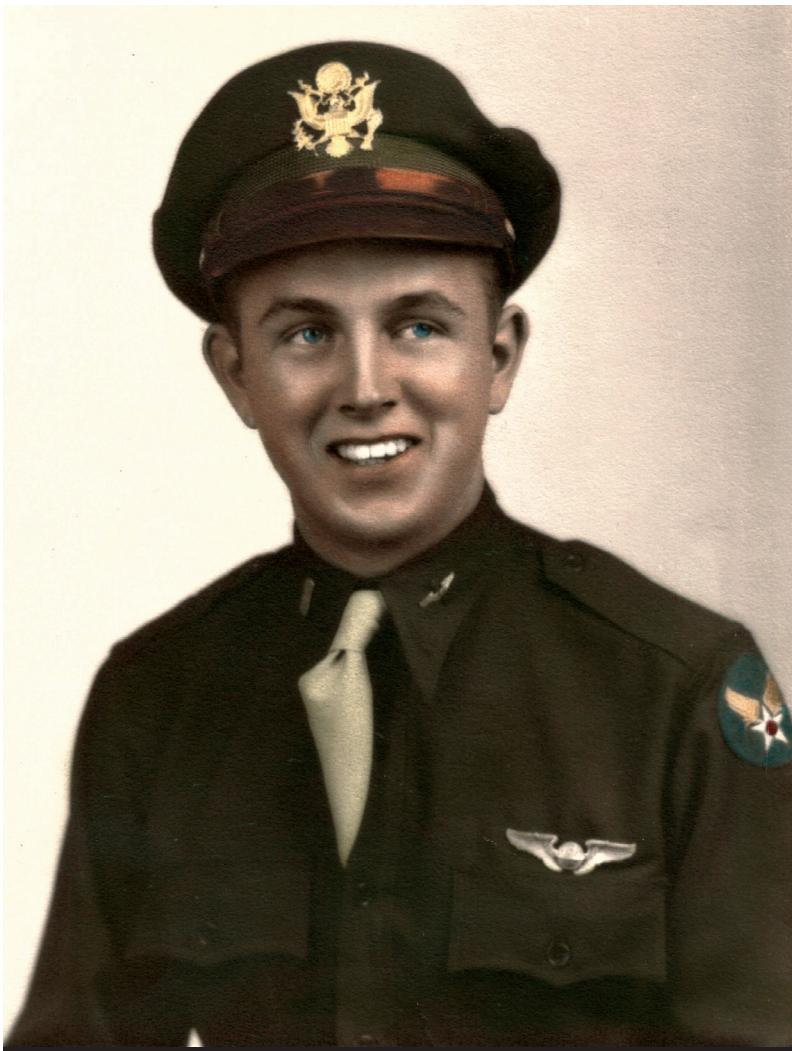
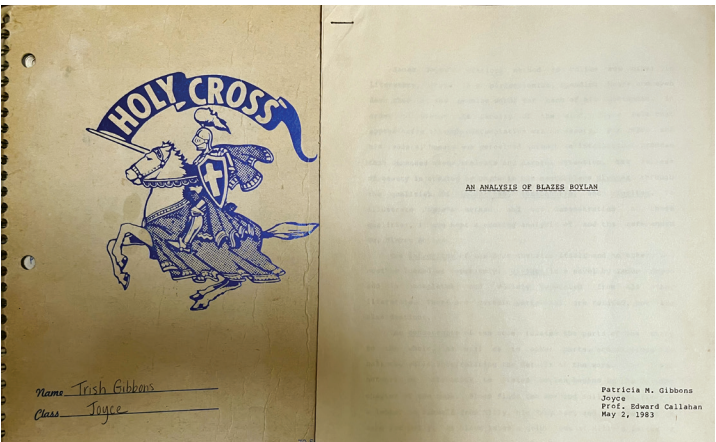
“He was kind of a self-made academic person,” says his eldest son, Dennis Callahan ’76. “Brockton is a big sports town and academics weren’t really that big then, so he was kind of unique that way. He was a man of languages.”

And of opinions. Which he would share, solicited or not.

“Rocky Marciano was the same age as my father and they worked together on a highway crew in the summers,” younger son Colin Callahan ’80 recalls.

Over lunch one day, Callahan said he wanted to go to college and become an English professor. Marciano confided that he wanted to become a professional boxer.

“And my father said, ‘Rocky, don’t be an idiot. You’re just going to end up punch drunk in a bar. There’s no future in boxing for you. Get a job with a highway crew or with a gas company or something, but



OPPOSITE Deciphering Callahan’s handwriting was a challenge for students; his youngest son, Colin, was once asked to decode his father’s comments for a student. Many of Callahan’s students kept papers, notebooks, letters and even syllabi from his courses. **ABOVE** (clockwise from left) Callahan in his Air Force uniform, teaching a seminar and seated in Kimball with son Colin.

don’t go into boxing.”

Fortunately for legions of boxing fans, Marciano ignored Callahan’s advice and became the only world heavyweight champion to retire with a perfect record, 49-0, in 1956.

“My father ran into Rocky twice after that,” Colin Callahan says, then laughs. “Each time Rocky would say to him, ‘So, Ed, what do you think about my boxing now?’”

First up for both men was military service: Marciano in the U.S. Army and Callahan in the U.S. Air Force. Callahan enlisted at 18 and flew bomb missions in World War II out of Southern Italy in a B-24. Upon his return, and with the aid of the GI Bill, Callahan continued his academic career, earning bachelor’s and master’s

degrees from Boston College, in 1950 and 1952, respectively, and a Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin in 1956.

In 1957, he was offered a position in the Holy Cross English department by the Rev. Thomas J. Grace, S.J. Recollecting on the offer decades later, Callahan’s dry humor and blue-collar Brockton upbringing were in full flare. You might even call him pugilistic.

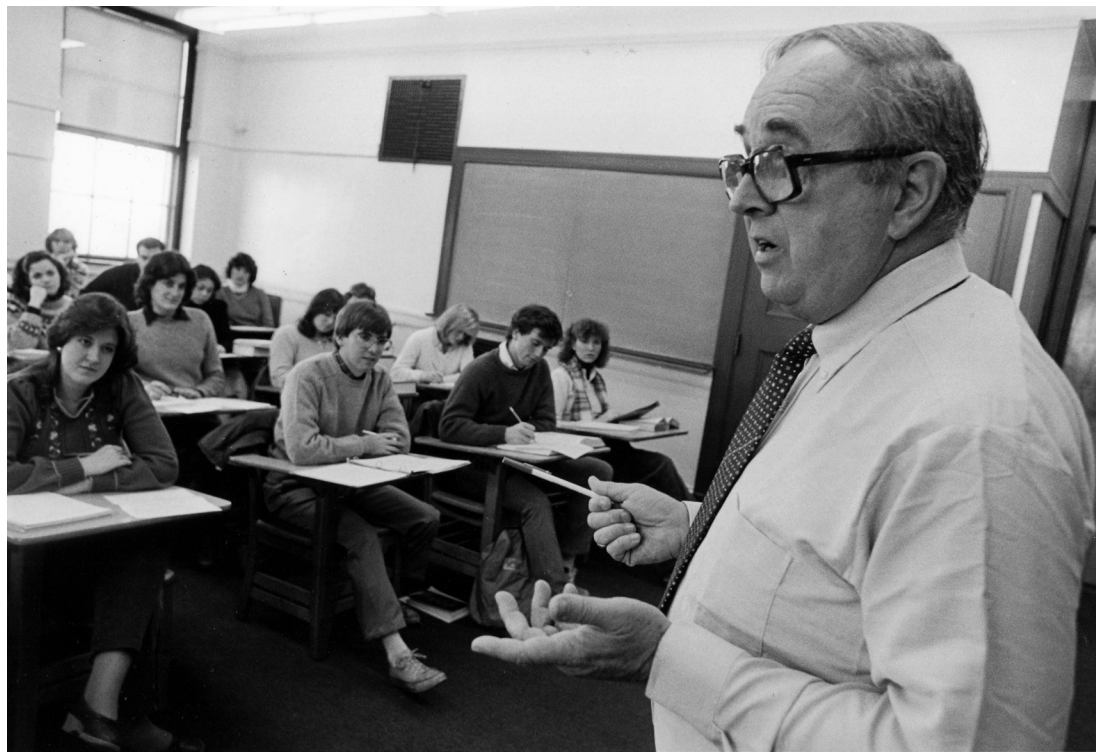
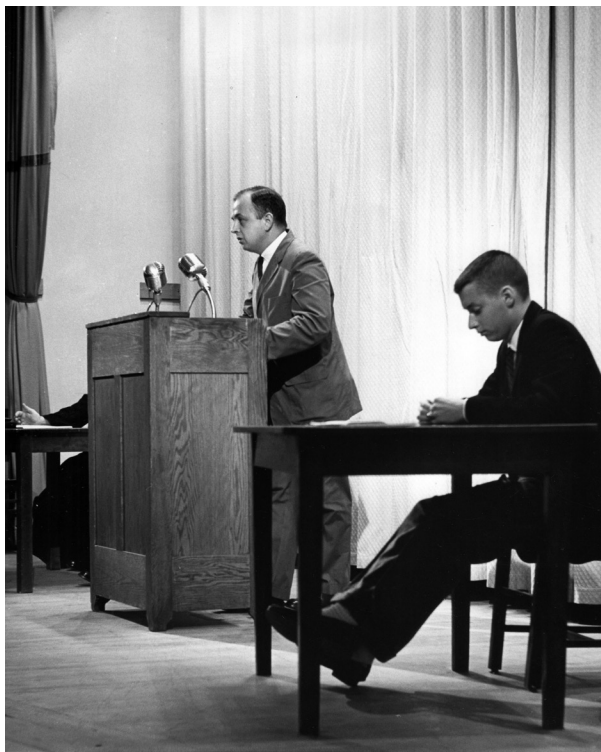
“I have to say I felt insulted,” Callahan told Worcester Telegram & Gazette columnist James Dempsey in a 1990 interview. “I had been to Boston College, you see, and I had all those prejudices then prevalent about Holy Cross — that the place was superficial, upper-class, snobby. In Brockton, if the blue-collar Irish were lucky enough to be able to send a child to

college, it was Boston College. Holy Cross was for the doctor or lawyer who couldn’t get his kid into Harvard. So I got this offer from Father Tom Grace and I wrote back a ‘note imperious,’ in which I said I wanted a guarantee I could teach elective courses, that I wanted a two-year contract, and that I wanted a moving fee. I thought, ‘That’ll fix him.’ And he wrote back saying, ‘Fine.’ So I came. And I’ve never regretted the choice.”

At Holy Cross, Callahan’s star rose quickly. In 1959, he became director of the College’s special studies and honors program and advanced an approach to education that prized individuality and encouraged diversity.

“Talented students should be permitted to develop in accordance with their talents and desires,” Callahan said in a 1961 interview with the College’s Crossroads publication. “Programs for talented students should be tailored to the student. If the talented student is tailored





“Every class was like a riveting theatrical performance and every class seemed to end way too soon. On more than one occasion, when his class would end, we would all break out in applause.”

DAVID LUDT '69

but that was OK. I'm not sure we ever changed each other's minds – other than, maybe, about each other.”

Whall reads snippets of letters from a lengthy correspondence they had once both had retired: “You know he was a fighter pilot in World War II; he never talked about it. He carried that, as did Fr. Brooks.”

That would be the Rev. John E. Brooks, S.J. '49, who served as president of the College from 1970 to 1994.

“They carried a notion of duty and responsibility and obligation to saving others that continued into their civilian lives,” Whall says. “Ed could have gone a lot of places, but he chose to come to a small liberal arts Jesuit college – and to help build its future was both brave and good of him. He was the right person at the right time.”

Callahan put his signature spin on it in a 1983 Crossroads interview: “I can say that over the years I have come in contact with at least 5,000 people here in the student body, faculty, staff and alumni. It has been a privilege to know and work with 4,991 of them.”

THE OBSERVANCE OF THE SACRAMENTS DURING TEXACO OPERA HOUR

Often, when Callahan wasn't at the College, the College came to him. In the early years of his tenure, students in his classes received an invitation to dine at their professor's home once a semester. Callahan's late wife, Mary, prepared the

to the program, he soon loses interest and will not achieve the scholarship he is capable of.”

SHAKESPEARE, DANTE AND JOYCE – “ALL THE LIGHTWEIGHTS”

By 1965, Callahan was head of the English department. Three years later, he was promoted to full professor. He taught an impressive array of genres: modern Irish literature, modern British and American literature, contemporary poetry and a seminar on Italian opera. And, of course, Shakespeare, Dante and Joyce – “all the lightweights,” says emerita Professor of English Helen Whall, Callahan's colleague, friend and fellow short-lister for the Mount Rushmore of Holy Cross faculty.

Whall first encountered Callahan in December 1975 in a hotel room at a Holiday Inn in Providence, Rhode Island, where the Modern Language Association, a professional association for college and university teachers, had scheduled interviews for open New England teaching positions. The scene was “Mad Men” meets “Best in Show.” Whall and fellow job candidates awaited interviews amid caged canines in the hotel lobby, which was hosting a dog show that weekend.

Whall wanted the open position in the English department at Holy Cross.

ABOVE “If he had a lecture, we'd say to him, ‘Dward, how did it go?’ And he would either say, ‘I got away with it’ or ‘I was brilliant,’” says son Colin. “I shared this in his eulogy and right after the funeral, Helen Whall comes up to me and says, ‘Colin, congratulations, you got away with it.’” **OPPOSITE** Former students say Callahan was a tough-but-fair grader and an “A” from the professor was coveted, O'Connell Murphy says.

“So I go up to a room and there are these four men: one sitting on the bed, one on a chair, and two on a sofa. And there's an empty swivel chair in the middle,” Whall recalls. “I couldn't believe it. I sat in the swivel chair and said, as I spun, ‘Well, does the person who spins and doesn't fall off get the job?’

“I think Ed sort of smiled at me. I think I got the job right then, but remember, this is a dream job. There were so few jobs in the humanities, and I'm talking and Ed's taking notes and, after a while, one of the men asks, ‘Do you have any questions for us?’ And, so, well, you should know my father used to always call me a wiseass, which Ed would agree with, so I looked at them all and said, ‘What do you mean? Like, what's your insurance like?’

“And Ed said, ‘Exactly!’”

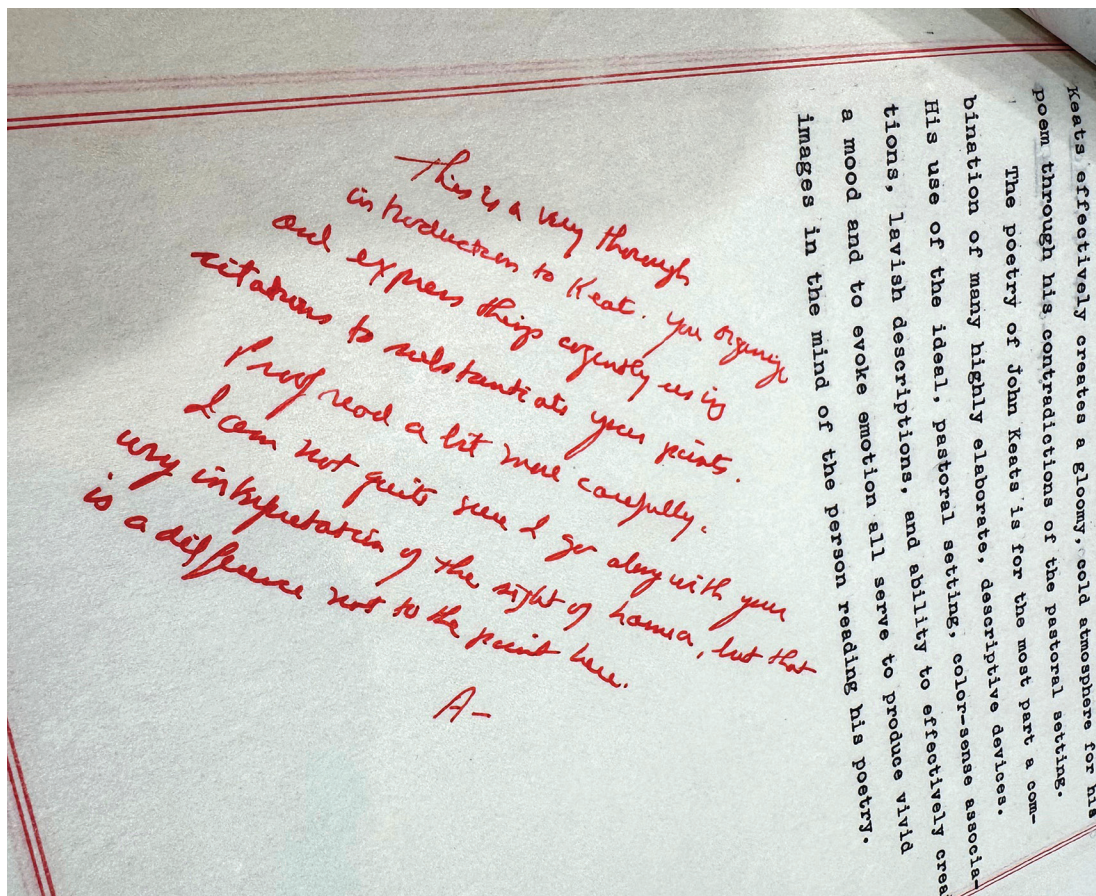
Whall saw the method in the madness. All of the candidates interviewing were supremely qualified. This was about something else. (Maybe something like whether a woman would be able to hold her own in a department full of men teaching in classrooms full of men.)

“I think Ed wanted to know whether I'd be able to work at Holy Cross, whether I'd be someone he'd like to have lunch with,” Whall says. “Tom Grace had hired Ed to build a department that would understand the special nature of Holy Cross, but also have the credentials to meet the modern world and to give students access to everything. And so they did.”

In those early years of working together, Whall was initially impressed by Callahan's generosity. “I was absolutely thunderstruck that in my first year of teaching at Holy Cross, I was given a Shakespeare survey for non-majors. That is so unusual,” she notes. “Usually, you have to do a whole lot of intro courses before you can jump to the major courses.”

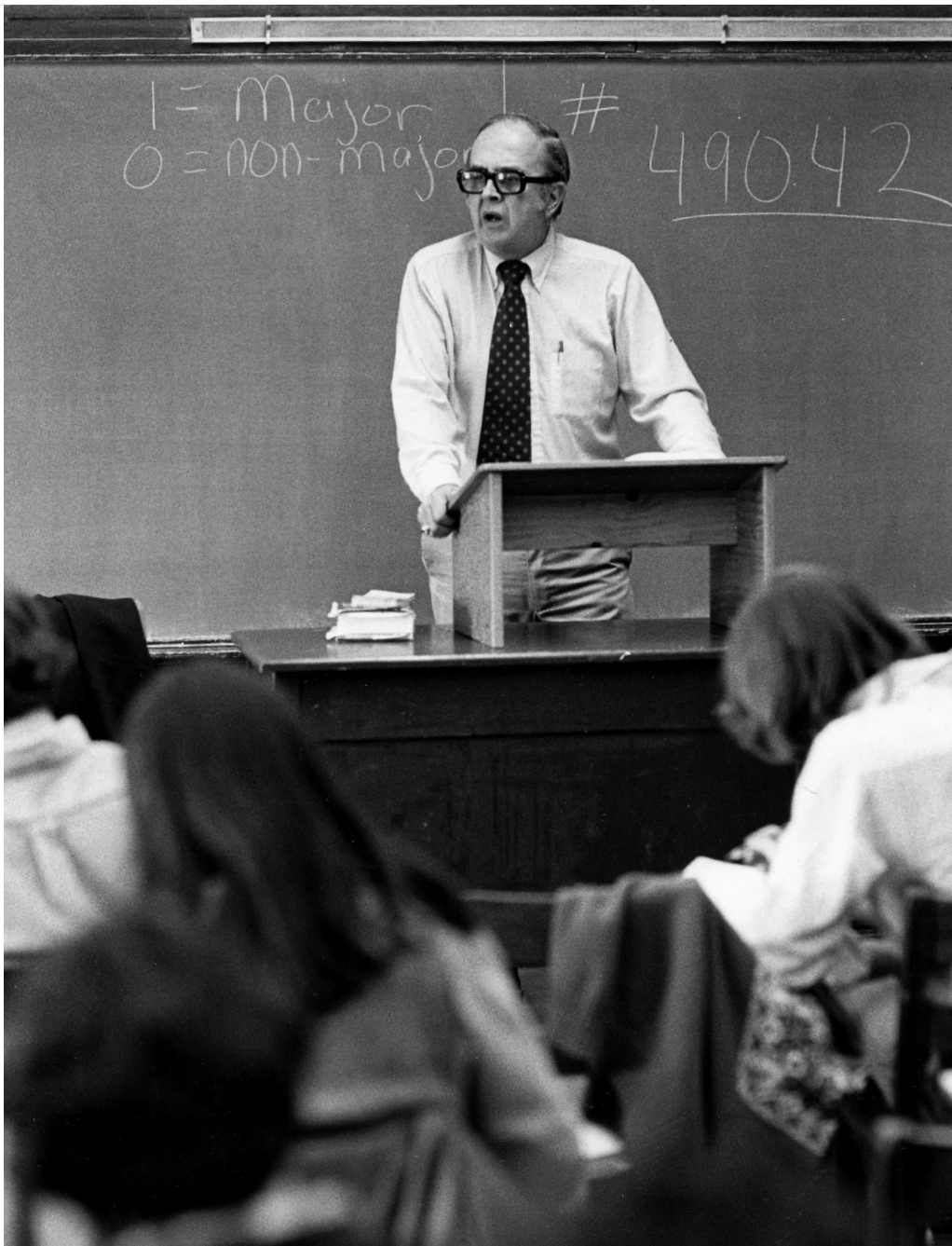
And when Whall was feeling trepidation about her retirement in 2017 and what she'd do next, it was Callahan who consoled her: “He said, ‘Don't worry. You take your talents with you. You don't have to go looking. They'll find you.’”

Of course, two such intellects with shared interests are bound to have



their differences, Whall admits. And the '70s ushered in all kinds of change for academia. As the era of single-sex education came to a close at Holy Cross, scholarship was opening up, admitting new theoretical frameworks, such as feminist critical theory, and new courses, such as Whall's Shakespeare's Women.

“Ed was slow to change, but he was able to change, and that is so crucial in academia,” she says. “Things were changing in critical theory in the canon and all that was bubbling up and onto the man who had made a department and that was a challenge. And he did not want to get it wrong. We did not always agree,



meals, which were capped off with her homemade brownies. These were coveted invitations and experiences alumni recall with gratitude decades later. The Callahans hosted parties for the English department and visits from Jesuits were frequent, too. Often, a Jesuit would say Mass in the Callahan home before dinner was served. (Callahan's breaking with his parish priest over a sermon damning existentialism may have had everything to do with the Saturday afternoon home celebrations of Mass, Colin Callahan notes.) If, however, a Jesuit wasn't expected on a Saturday, the family would follow a strict schedule centered around The Texaco Opera Hour;

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EDWARD CALLAHAN

that is, the Saturday afternoon radio broadcast of New York's Metropolitan Opera, which would fall smack in the middle of the sacrament of confession at the Grafton, Massachusetts, Catholic church the family attended.

“We would be given the signal at a certain point, which was the intermission of the opera, which would give us 5 minutes to get over to Grafton for confession,” recalls Colin Callahan. “We'd all pile into the car, drive over to Grafton and Ed would run in for confession. Then we'd go in and he would head back to the car so he could hear the rest of the opera. It was a weird upbringing.”

A weird upbringing replete with music, conversation, good food and laughter.

“We used to kid him that he never exercised,” Colin Callahan says. “Ed's body was only there to move his head from a book to a meal and then back again to the book.”

“He was a person who really valued relationships with people and he was a student of language,” Dennis Callahan says. “I think, even to this day, what I miss most about his passing at the young age of 93 is the way he spoke, how he would turn a phrase. And curiosity was something he demanded. He didn't demand we get great marks, but he always wanted us to be curious to learn.”

“UNFORTUNATELY, HERR HOGENKRIEG, ORIGINALITY DOESN'T ALWAYS IMPLY GENIUS.”

Arguably, Callahan shone brightest in the classroom. Oddly, the formality he affected in the classroom fostered familiarity and, eventually, community.

“He was formal with a wink,” says Lisa Villa '90, who took Shakespeare with Callahan in her senior year, which was also his last year teaching at Holy Cross.

In Professor Callahan's class, you weren't Bill, Kathy and Peter. You were Mr. Olsen, Miss (or Ms.) Monahan and Mr. Hogenkamp (or some variation thereof). A lucky few received a custom epithet, as was the case for Bill Olsen

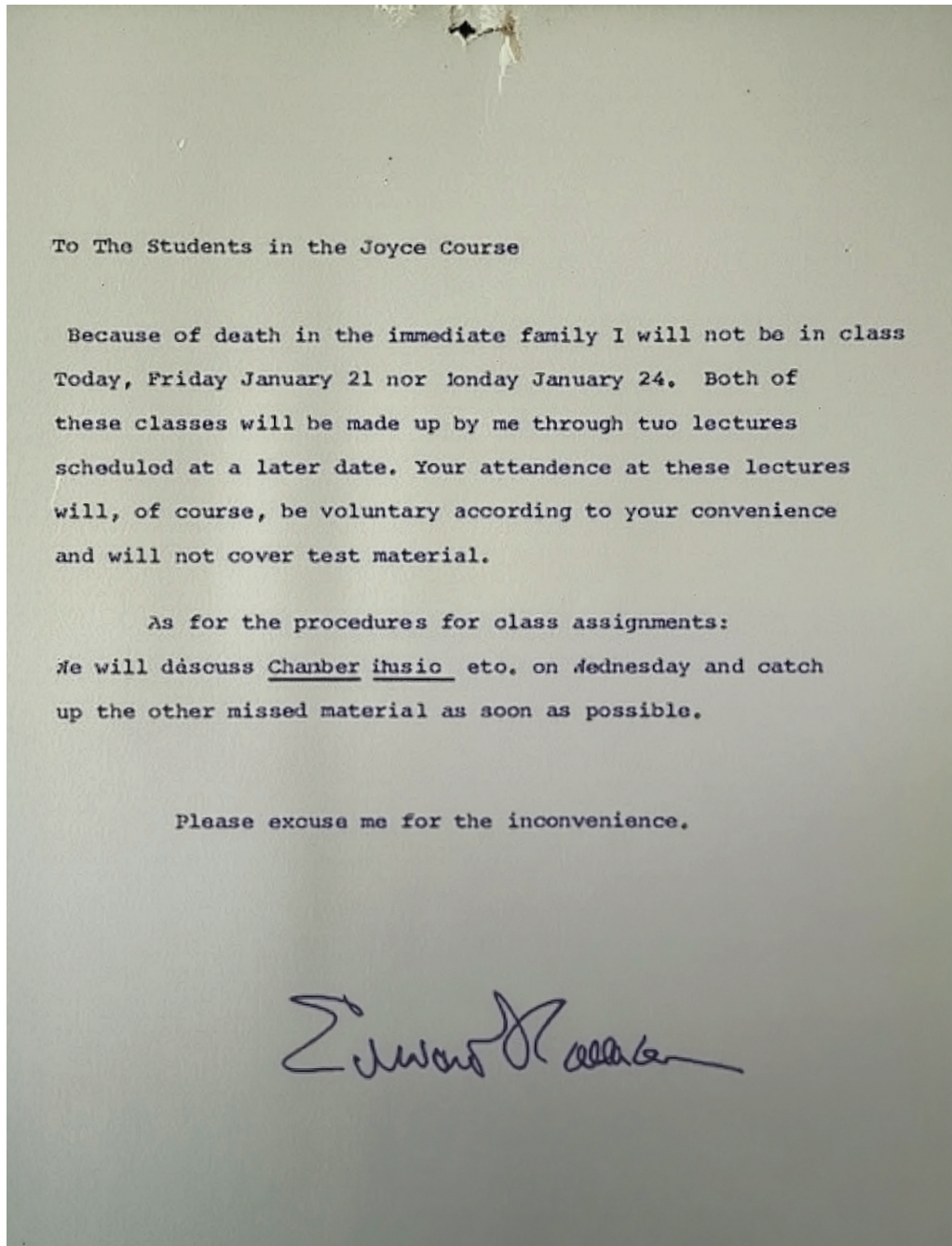
OPPOSITE Callahan on academic freedom: “Holy Cross, of all the schools I know, is the one where you get the greatest academic freedom. At the University of Wisconsin in 1956, we couldn't teach ‘The Grapes of Wrath.’ But at Holy Cross, I've taught ‘Ulysses’ and ‘Lady Chatterley's Lover,’ to mention only two controversial books. Of course, I can imagine some of the letters that have been written.” **RIGHT** (top) Callahan expected punctuality and perfect attendance in his classes. If he had to cancel class, students would receive a formal notice. (below) For much of his career, Callahan and his wife, Mary, annually hosted dinners for students at his home.

'86, who, when called upon, was not just “Mr. Olsen,” but “Mr. Olsen and his Norwegian ways.” Olsen, now superintendent of schools in Rutland, Vermont, calls Callahan the best educator he's ever encountered.

“Looking back on Ed's teaching style, I was always in awe of his abilities. He could lecture the entire class and yet everyone was engaged and on the edge of their seats as he wove a fascinating story and pulled us all in to participate in a complex class discussion on the topic of the extremely challenging literature of Joyce,” Olsen says. “Without doubt, his love of literature caused us all to love the content as well, and he helped me eventually decide that I wanted to teach as a vocation.”

Classes were performances, says David Ludt '69: “The depth of his knowledge seemed unfathomable; his energy, inexhaustible, and his ability to engage his students in an entertaining way – while deepening their understanding of the course material – was truly masterful. Every class was like a riveting theatrical performance and every class seemed to end way too soon. On more than one occasion, when his class would end, we would all break out in applause.”

The fun and games started on the first day with the roll call and the reading of the syllabus. In the vein of improv actors and comics, Callahan would listen for something to riff on, a regional accent or an unusual surname. Irish-American surnames beginning with O' were an easy mark. “Do you think your names weren't Irish enough without the added O at the beginning?” he would





ask. It was a reliable icebreaker given the general composition of classes in Irish literature and Joyce courses.

Callahan was also known for asking esoteric questions so particular that a student had little hope of having the right answer. This, too, created camaraderie between professor and student.

The Rev. John F. Baldovin, S.J. '69, a professor at the Clough School of Theology and Ministry at Boston College, maintained a close relationship with Callahan until his death. He would give Callahan the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick and preside over his funeral Mass.

"My first real memory of him was when I was being interviewed for the honors program. He asked if I knew the difference between Ugaritic and Finno-Ugric," recalls Fr. Baldovin. "I said I didn't know, but I thought they were two different language groups. He smiled, and I got in."

Peter Hogenkamp, M.D., '86, was a chemistry major looking to have "the Callahan experience" when he enrolled

in Survey of Irish Literature in his senior year: "I'm pretty sure I was the only non-English major, and I think Professor Callahan appreciated the fact that I would give my direct, unadulterated opinion on the reading."

Callahan's rejoinders would begin with a deliberate misremembering of his name: "Häagen-Dazs," "Hogenkaeze," "Hogenkrieg," followed by variations on a theme: wrong.

Example: "I have been teaching this poem for over 30 years, Herr Hogenkamp, and that is the first time I have ever heard that opinion. Unfortunately, Herr Hokenkrieg, originality doesn't always imply genius."

It was great training for medical school, Dr. Hogenkamp says.

"I had this internal medicine rotation led by this great teacher, but he would always try to trip you up, make you uncomfortable, etc.," he recalls. "His whole point was that you have to be ready to defend yourself, to cite references, to stand your ground. Ed's class stood me in good stead. His example has helped me throughout my



ABOVE Callahan with wife, Mary, and daughter, Caitlin Callahan '78 and *(right)* with his grandchildren. **OPPOSITE** Callahan with his great-grandchild and namesake. *(right)* Author Peter Hogenkamp, M.D., '86, says Callahan's teaching style primed him for med school: "His whole point was that you have to be ready to defend yourself, to cite references, to stand your ground. His example has helped me throughout my entire career."

"He was formal with a wink."

LISA VILLA '90

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During a 2025 visit to the College, another of Callahan's former students, Anthony Fauci, M.D., '62, Hon. '87 said, "I had a great affinity for him and his class because of the way he approached the English language. Precision of thought and economy of expression. His favorite thing was when someone would come into class and start talking and the person would go in 16 different directions, and Professor Callahan would say, 'You really would be much more effective if you communicate to me one precise thought that I can get my arms around and, importantly, say it in as few words as possible as we don't have a lot of time.' I've brought that mantra with me throughout my entire career in something that is far removed from English literature; namely, in presenting an interesting scientific or public health concept to people, I've used the same approach."

Another lesson former students recall with regularity: Absenteeism would not be tolerated.



In a 1983 syllabus from Callahan's Joyce seminar, that hallmark combination of humor and seriousness is brought to bear on his absenteeism policy:

"Under no circumstances will absentee examinations or late papers be accommodated. In the case of a student missing an hour examination because of serious reasons, he will be allowed the opportunity of demonstrating his mastery of the material by submitting a lengthy (35 pp.) term paper on a subject determined by the instructor."

Put another way (as he did in his Joyce seminar in the fall of 1987): "The only reason to miss this class is death (long theatrical pause) as in yours."

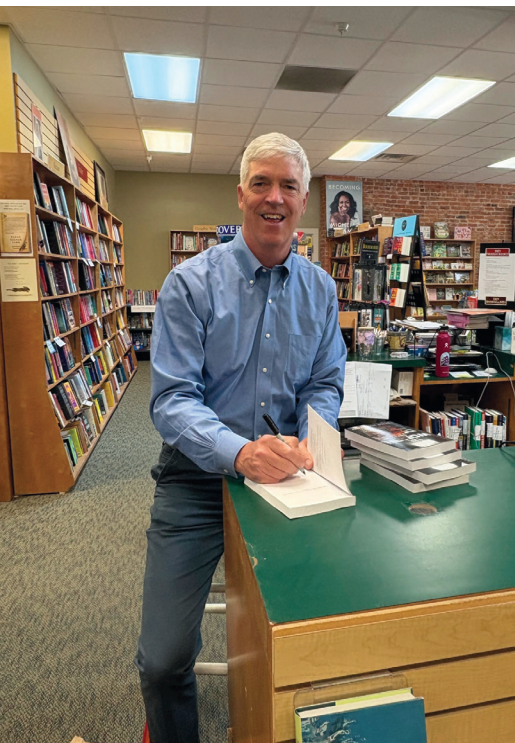
"He once called a student who'd missed class twice to ask him when the funeral was," Colin Callahan says.

J. Michael Joyce '79 is such a fan of his former professor that he shelves his "Riverside Shakespeare" — "with all my notes in the margins" — next to his Bible. And yet, Joyce, albeit reluctantly, once tested Callahan's resolve.

"I was the best man at my Uncle Tim's wedding and I had to get down to New York City at some point on a Saturday," Joyce shares. "I said to Tim, 'I've got a Shakespeare exam that morning.' Tim says, 'I took Callahan; just tell him it's my wedding and see if you can take it a day earlier.'"

"So, of course, I walk in with my head down and ask and he said no," Joyce continues. "He said, 'When's the wedding?' I said, 'Probably, 3 or 4 in the afternoon in New York.' He said, 'Fine. It takes three hours to get to New York City. We'll figure this out. Be in my office at 8 o'clock Saturday morning. You'll be done by 11 and can be in a car by 11:15 and on your way.' Which is what I did. He would not show favoritism under any circumstances. I just think he wanted everybody to play by the same rules."

A request for memories of Callahan prompted many alumni to share stories of how his example spurred them on to careers as high school English teachers and professors, some ascending to the heights of their profession, such as American medievalist Traugott Lawler '58, professor emeritus at Yale University, authority on Chaucer and English poet William Langland, and author of the books "The Penn Commentary on Piers Plowman, Volume Four," and "The One and



the Many in The Canterbury Tales," among others. Lawler, along with classmates Michael O'Loughlin, John Wilson and Art McGuinness, all earned Ph.D.s and taught college English (Wilson at Holy Cross). Lawler says all four friends held their professor in the highest regard in matters of literature and life.

"Ed had joie de vivre. He definitely had joie d'enseigner (love of teaching), he just loved teaching, but he loved every other part of life, too," Lawler says. "His urging me to marry, young though I was, came from that — and here we are, Peggy and I, in our late 80s, happily moving toward our 67th anniversary."

"He has been a model of good teaching and wise living for me through my whole life," Lawler says. "I feel lucky to have known him."

Peter Merrigan '88, CEO and managing partner of Taurus Investment Holdings LLC, established the Professor Edward Callahan Irish Studies Support Fund more than 20 years ago. Like Lawler, Merrigan found a mentor in Callahan.

"If you took one of his classes, you knew you were taking the hardest subject matter with the most talented professor on campus," Merrigan says. "It wasn't easy — you were taking apart 'Ulysses' after



“According to the Chinese, we die twice. Once when our body gives up, and a second time when the last person tells the last story about you. That there are stories still being told about Ed says he’s still very much alive.”

HELEN WHALL
PROFESSOR EMERITA OF ENGLISH

all — but he made it seem that that was something you could do.”

As graduation neared, Merrigan, uncertain about what he wanted to do in life, sought Callahan’s counsel: “I was spinning around in my own head. Should I be a lawyer? Go back to school? And he simplified things for me, helped me dissect my own life. He asked me, ‘What gets you up in the morning that you’re excited about?’ And I always liked building things, taking things apart and rebuilding them.”

Callahan’s counsel cleared his head, Merrigan says: “That conversation, I kind of equate it with his teaching style. He could take a complicated problem and make it understandable. That was his gift.”

Today, English Professor Paige Reynolds runs the Edward Callahan Irish Studies Support Fund, which allows her to bring high-profile contemporary Irish writers to campus to give public readings and

work with students. The fund also supports projects at the Museum of Literature Ireland (MoLI) in Dublin, including short-term residencies for Irish writers and internships for Holy Cross students studying in Dublin.

“The Callahan Fund has given Holy Cross a global presence,” Reynolds says. “We’ve built a great reputation among the close-knit community of Irish writers and academics, who rave about our talented and engaged students, and we’ve been able to partner with MoLI on outreach from its early days.”

The Callahan Fund has been important to Reynolds’ work as a scholar and teacher, too. “These annual readings allow a unique engagement with literature: Students read and study books by the visiting authors and then have the chance to chat with them. Thanks to the Callahan Fund, we can find new and exciting ways to inspire students to put down their



phones and discover what becomes, I hope, a life-long love for reading and talking about literature.”

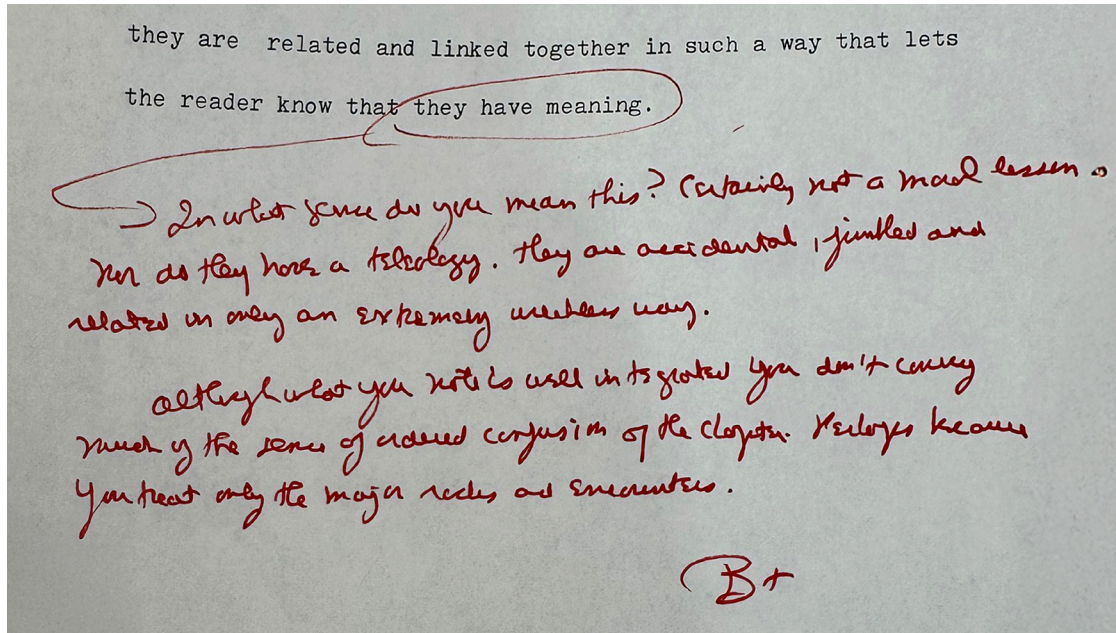
“OUT, OUT BRIEF CANDLE”
Edward Callahan died in April 2018 at age 93. He would have turned 100 this year. The bottom of his headstone reads: “Out out brief candle.” The phrase, a nod to “Macbeth,” has special significance to the Callahan children; it was how their father bade them goodnight.

In the photo accompanying his obituary, Callahan is smiling and sporting an earring.

“Ed had his ear pierced when he was 80, and he was very proud of it, probably because it shocked people,” Colin Callahan says. “One day, my wife, Toni, was telling him she was brought up with a strict family rule that she would never have her ears pierced. He says, ‘I have a plan: Let’s both get our ears pierced and when your mother sees mine, she’ll think nothing of yours.’ And it worked.”

Callahan was like that: a co-conspirator, a raconteur, a provocateur. He would tell people he hated children, dogs and sports (two truths and a lie there) and had little use for St. Patrick’s Day and “Angela’s Ashes.”

“One of the women in the registrar’s office grew plants in her office and was convinced that if you talked to them, they



OPPOSITE A Joyce reading group (with five Holy Cross graduates) formed in Callahan’s honor still meets at the Irish American Heritage Museum in Albany, New York. (right) Callahan’s headstone bears the Shakespeare quote “Out, out brief candle,” a quotation from “Macbeth” Callahan invoked to send his children to bed.

ABOVE Bridget O’Connell Murphy ’86 says she would grab three things if her house was on fire: her wedding album, her grandmother’s ring and 39-year-old English papers she’d written for Callahan.

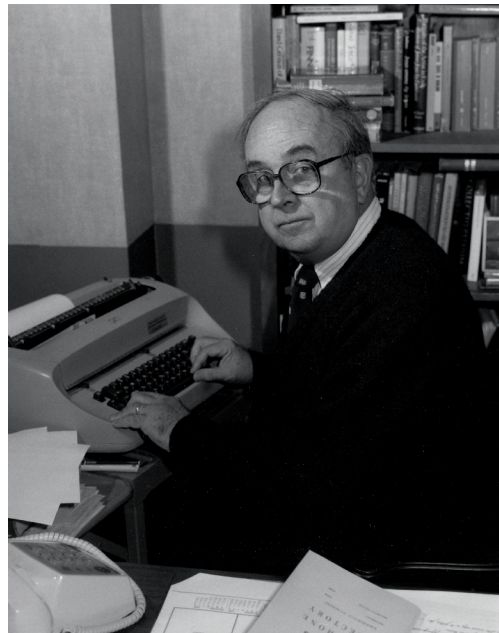
would grow better. And Ed would always — every time he walked in — tell the plant, “Drop dead.” Colin Callahan says.

And Callahan, being as he was a champion of concision and precision, skewered euphemisms for death.

“I went to Ed’s retirement community to take him to lunch and he said, ‘Oh, I need to check my mail,’ and there were two letters for the person who used to live in his apartment. She had died. And he goes, ‘Watch this,’” Colin Callahan says. “And I’m, like, ‘Oh, shoot.’ Off he goes to the main desk and says, ‘Here. She’s dead.’ And he handed the receptionist the letters and said, ‘OK. Let’s go to lunch.’”

“According to the Chinese, we die twice,” Whall notes. “Once when our body gives up, and a second time when the last person tells the last story about you. That there are stories still being told about Ed says he’s still very much alive.”

That is overwhelmingly the case. More Callahan stories were shared than could be covered in this piece. Each one heartfelt and beautiful. There’s that time he presented at a James Joyce Festival at SUNY Purchase, where actress Colleen



but he invited us all in; he assumed we could all participate.”

Margaret Lasch Carroll ’77, professor emerita of English and humanities at Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, spent 30 years teaching English and Irish literature. At Holy Cross, she took every Callahan course she could fit into her schedule, including the Joyce seminar in her senior year.

“One of the details from ‘Ulysses’ is an anonymous postcard one character receives with the letters ‘U.P.’,” Carroll says. “In 2000, I sent Dr. Callahan a ‘U.P.’ card, and we began a lovely correspondence. His beloved Italian-American wife had died, he told me, and he moved to a condo not too far from Worcester, a place he called ‘The Home!’ In his first long letter to me, he ended it by saying he hoped my life had been full of yeses.”

Joyce scholars will tell you he wanted to end his masterpiece with the most positive word in the English language, so “Ulysses” ends with the word “Yes.”

Carroll formed a Joyce reading group in Callahan’s honor. It meets at the Irish American Heritage Museum in Albany.

“We are still going strong,” she says. “Every chance I get, I acknowledge Dr. Edward Callahan to our group, inspiring me still.”

Yes. ■