

# Autobiography for Douglas Robertson

I was born in New York City just after World War II and grew up in a small town just outside of the city. I started my college education at [Purdue University](#). My father's side of the family is from Indiana and they all attended Purdue, including my grandfather [C. H. Robertson](#) who, after 30 years as Director of Education for the YMCA in China, became a physics professor at Purdue. In the early 1900's, he and his family traveled throughout China, Mongolia, and western Russia teaching physics to the common folk and demystifying the natural world for them. My freshman year I was on the [wrestling](#) and [track](#) teams (discus) but found that being a [physics major](#) left me little time for Big Ten athletics and so I did not continue athletics in my sophomore year. For my junior year, I took a leave of absence to attend [Adelphi University](#) so I could play football with my older brother, who was then a senior at Adelphi. I returned to Purdue for my senior year and graduated with a major in physics and a minor in mathematics.

After graduation I moved to Minnesota to work on a Ph.D. in astrophysics at the [University of Minnesota](#). I soon realized that astrophysics was not for me and I switched to geophysics. I had the opportunity to do field work in Mexico under the direction of Professor Rob Roy, who was doing research on heat flow and the then growing field of [plate tectonics](#). Working two summers in the deserts of [Baja California](#) and [Sonora](#) and getting to know the people in the small towns was an incredibly rich experience for me and changed my perspectives on life and what I wanted to do with mine. I had always loved physics and mathematics but did not have much talent for doing research in either so I decided to become a high school teacher. At that time I met a wonderful and supportive woman and we were married and raised two children. My wife has retired from dentistry and now keeps up her skill in working with metal by volunteering for the [Ramsey County Historical Society](#) where she gives blacksmithing demonstrations at [Gibbs Farm Museum](#) on the Saint Paul campus.

After one disastrous year teaching junior high school mathematics, I found my dream job as an instructor in the [General College](#) (GC) at the University of Minnesota. [GC](#) was the open-admissions unit of the University and, as such, focused on helping non-traditional and at-risk students, who were mostly low income, first generation college students, and students of color. I taught developmental mathematics, physics, geology, and computer programming while working on a Ph.D. in mathematics education. During that time I also gave clinics and taught mathematics classes through the Math Anxiety Program of the Department of Continuing Education for Women. I completed my Ph.D. in 1979 and was promoted to assistant professor of developmental mathematics in GC. I loved my job where I could bring the wonders and joys of mathematics and science to the underserved, just as my grandfather had done in Asia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. I was proud to help those who had great difficulty with mathematics and who had never imagined that they could attend college. GC graduation rates were low but many students got a taste of what college was all about and brought that thrill of learning home to their extended families, where they inspired the next generation to further their education.

In 2006, much to its disgrace, the University of Minnesota abandoned that part of its [Land Grant](#) mission of being accessible to all the citizens of Minnesota. In a failed attempt to become the "Harvard of the Midwest", U administrators (the elitists who now vainly call themselves "leadership") [restructured several colleges](#) including GC, which was [dismantled](#) and turned into a department in the [College of Education and Human Development](#). About half the GC faculty formed the new [Department of Postsecondary Teaching and Learning](#) (PsTL). We were forced to abandon developmental education in both practice and research. Sadly, GC was one of the finest developmental collegiate units in the world but "leadership" deemed that having developmental students on campus was an embarrassment to a wannabe world class university.

PsTL faculty retained the [Scarlet Letter](#) of [GC](#) imprinted on us even as we strengthened our reputation of creative, innovative, and engaging curricular offerings and quality research. Students from all over the University registered for our courses, which were taught by top notch teaching specialists and professors rather than graduate students. Unfortunately, we so enraged the College of Liberal Arts by "stealing" their students that they demanded PsTL be dissolved and its faculty assigned to other departments where we

could no longer attract CLA students and their tuition dollars. I was transferred to the [Department of Curriculum and Instruction](#) in CEHD. Since 1932 GC faculty have struggled to be taken seriously by some traditional faculty and administrators but we had the backing of strong and visionary University Presidents who considered access and service to the public to be an important part of the mission of the University. That was no longer the case. Now, the priorities are Athletics, Research, and Teaching, with service to the citizens dead last. Nationally and internationally GC/PsTL faculty have been well-respected for our innovative multicultural and multidisciplinary curriculum and our outstanding teaching, research, and service, but still, many of the "home folk" treat us like the bastard sons and daughters of the U. And so, again to its disgrace, the University has failed in its mission to serve ALL the people of Minnesota.

In my spare time I enjoy playing guitar and singing songs by the likes of [Peter, Paul, and Mary](#), [Phil Ochs](#), [Bob Dylan](#), [Bill Stains](#), [John Prine](#), and the [Beatles](#). I like to read adventure novels by authors such as [Lee Child](#), [Douglas Preston](#), [Lincoln Child](#), [Michael Connelly](#), [Alexander Kent](#), and [James Clavel](#). During the summer, I enjoy growing tomatoes and peppers.