

LIVES LIVED

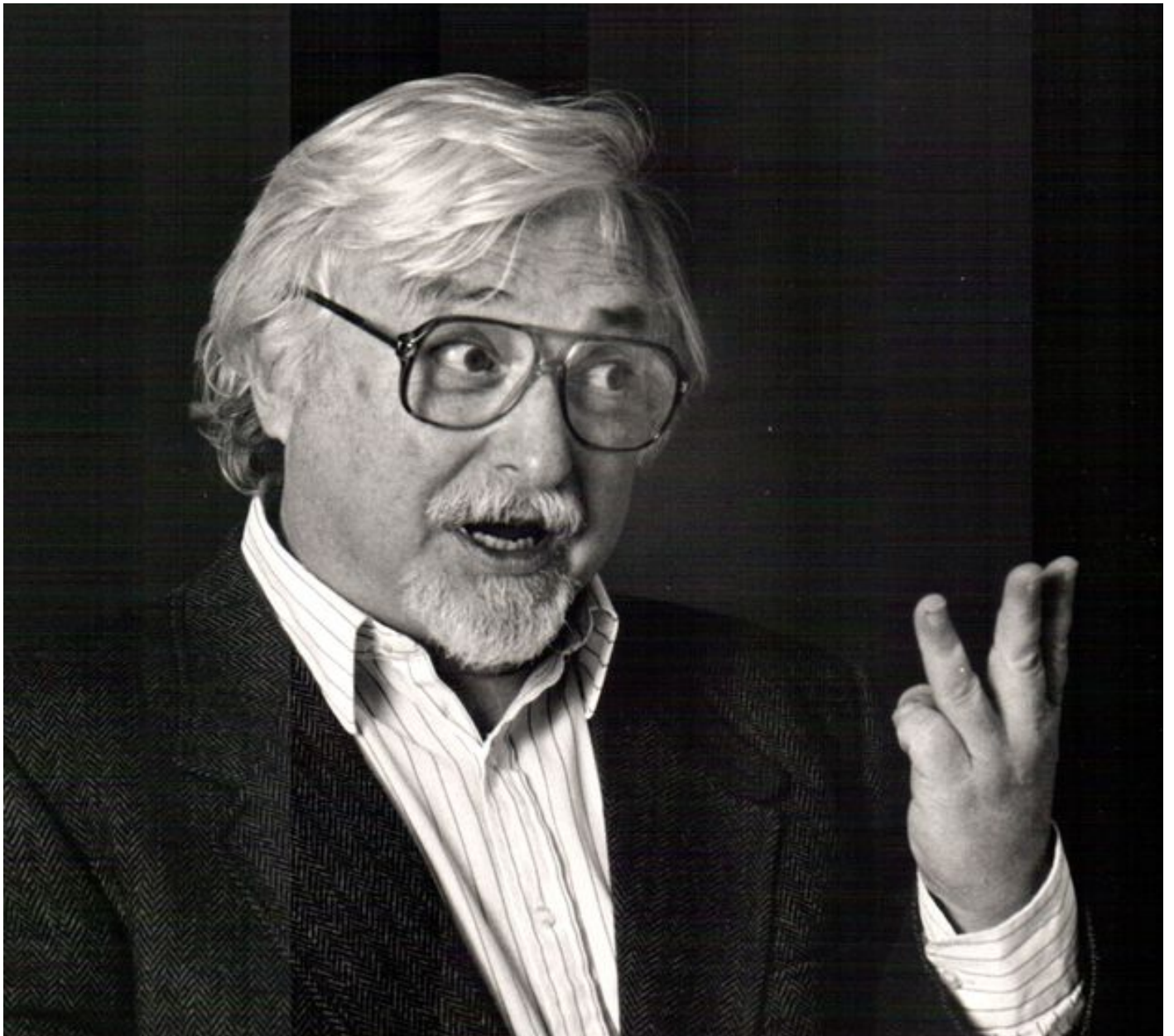
A philosopher and logician of note, Robert C. Pinto was also a natural entertainer from a young age

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Robert C. Pinto.

COURTESY OF THE FAMILY

Robert C. Pinto: *Philosopher. Informal Logician. Ventriloquist. Paisan. Born Nov. 11, 1935, in Hartford, Conn.; died Sept. 3, 2019, in Windsor, Ont., of complications from major neurocognitive disorder; aged 83.*

A natural entertainer from a young age, Bob Pinto was named Hartford High's 1953 Class Wit and Best Actor – “never without that contagious grin or glowing enthusiasm,” the yearbook editors wrote. He graduated from St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto, where he excelled in philosophy. During these years, Bob characterized himself a beatnik, publishing poetry regularly in the *Gryphon*, St. Michael's College literary review magazine. He went on to earn an MA and a PhD.

In 1963, “Young Pinto” (as senior faculty affectionately called him) joined the University of Windsor Philosophy department, remaining on faculty until 1999, when he retired with emeritus status. In 1964, he set his sights on Brone Badikonis, a pretty librarian at the university's Leddy Library. He repeatedly asked her out, only to be rebuffed until finally – exasperated – she agreed to accompany him to the Detroit Symphony. He charmed her, and they were married in 1965. Eventually, two children, Laura and Rob, completed the family.

In the 1970s, Bob became an informal logician, making many contributions to the emerging study of argumentation. He coined the well-cited phrase, “argument is an invitation to inference” in his 2001 book, *Argument, Inference and Dialectic*.

Bob is fondly remembered for his commitment to students, theatrical flair and humour. Upon his retirement, a student wrote, “He could get you laughing regardless of how down in the dumps you might be feeling.”

But philosophy was a second career choice. He would gleefully recount how his father, Angelo, put an end to his showbiz career before it started. As a teen, Bob admired ventriloquist Edgar Bergen. He wrote to Mr. Bergen, wondering where to find a dummy like Charlie McCarthy. To Bob's delight, Mr. Bergen replied, and Bob acquired a dummy from the same manufacturer. Bob named it Archie Watt. With practice, Bob became skilled at throwing his voice. His act included a second (smaller) dummy that sat on Archie's lap, rigged to operate through Archie's abdomen.

An agent attending a local talent show was impressed by Bob's two-dummy act, and he landed his first paid gig. Bob asked his father to drive him, but Angelo forbade his son to perform at a gentlemen's club. Although the agent never booked him again, Bob continued to perform at talent shows, hospitals and children's birthday parties, delighting audiences, and his children, for decades.

As much as Bob loved to entertain (he was also skilled at sleight of hand and music), his principal commitment remained philosophy. He was a logician first in his interactions with all people, young and old. He engaged our family in vibrant arguments, pushing us to think harder and question the rational status of our beliefs. As a consequence, family dinners were always intellectually challenging, where bonds were built through a vibrant exchange of ideas. No statement was too insignificant to warrant interrogation. "On what basis did you come to the conclusion that the dog is happy? What hard evidence supports claims that dogs experience emotions as we define them?" is the sort of questioning we came to expect and prepare for, inspiring us to become disciplined thinkers who enjoy an invitation to inference.

After Rob's sudden death in 2015, Bob experienced rapid onset of major neurocognitive disorder (NCD) – a wretched disease that robbed him of his memory and much of his reasoning and philosophical ability. However, his early showbiz training served him well in his final months in hospital: He put smiles on the faces of nurses and visitors with his enduring wit, masterful comedic timing and desire to entertain.

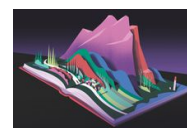
Laura Pinto is Bob's daughter.

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