

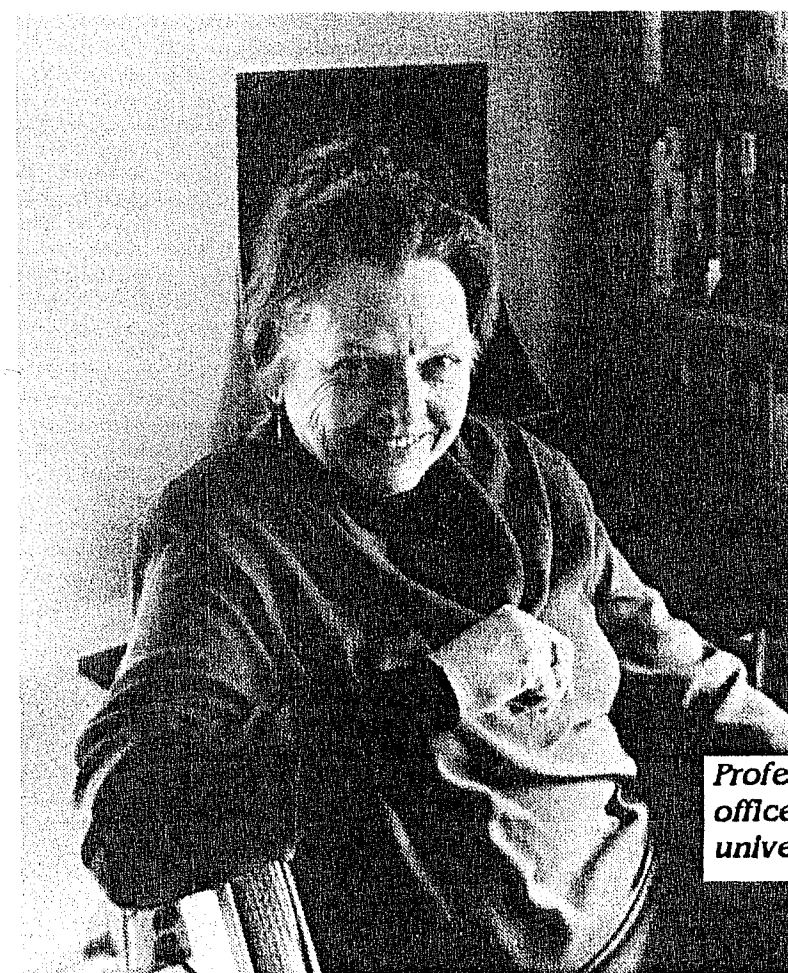
PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE FROM THE
GRETCHEN SCHOFF READING ROOM

*ASK THE ILS SECRETARY TO CHECK THIS BOOK OUT

COLLECTED

WISDOM

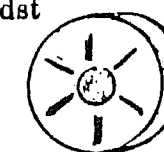
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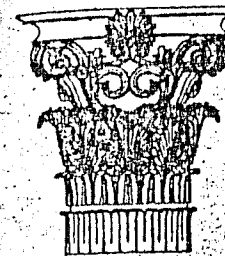


Professor Schoff in her office—"the best in the university," she claims.

Photo by Andrew Greenseid

Inventor of the Wheel of Life,
Steady center, in the midst
Of earth's turning,
Show us how to live
With loss and death,
With drift and endings.





The Best Professors at the University of Wisconsin as chosen by the students



Photo by Andrew Rawson

Start of the Semester: The Lecture I Didn't Give *by Gretchen Schoff*

For starters, in case you're wondering
How we have arrived at today,
You might consider the big bang,
Black holes, and quarks,
Coral reefs, orchids,
Finches and apes.

If it's letters you prefer,
Of course there are the fictions turned real,
All those Jobs and Hamlets
That keep getting off the pages
Asking questions we're at a loss
To ask for ourselves.

History doesn't help much.
You pays your money and takes your choice.
Bloody Hector, Absalom hanging by his hair,
Stalingrad in winter,
Auschwitz, year round,
Enough pain for a thousand Guernicas.

On the other side of the world,
The sun is going down.
Missiles, smarter than we are,
Are whizzing around corners,
Burning up the skies.

Heartbreakingly beautiful, young women and men,
We are gathered here together
In this temple of intellect
To study the progress of humanity,
To consider its accumulated wisdom.

Check your watches. At this very hour,
A million others, as young and beautiful as you,
Are choking on sand, hunkering down,
Digging holes, looking for places to sleep
In the cradle of civilization,
The fertile crescent,
The place where it all began.

(Copyright Gretchen Holstein Schoff, 1991)

PROFESSOR GRETCHEN SCHOFF

Teacher Resource Day
Canterbury Booksellers, Madison, Wisconsin
August 21, 1992

*(This is a transcript of an informal address given to a group of teachers.
It was never intended by Professor Schoff that this would be published.)*

I have been standing on that side of the room trying to figure out where I should stand so that I can see all of you, and I must admit that this side of the room makes me think of that line from Gilbert and Sullivan, "She doesn't look a day over 42 in the dust with the light behind her." A lot of you are silhouettes, so if I fail to make eye contact, it is because I can only see your seat. When Trudy called me, I said, "Nobody will get up at 8 o'clock in the morning the week before school starts," and I have to let you know that this is not my best hour. I am a night person. I am not famous for mental acuity; I am not even famous for being conscious at this hour. My children know that if they want anything, if they ask me before 6, I will give it to them if they will just go away.

I don't know quite how to define teaching. I think the definition of it is a little bit like the definition of research. It is what you are doing when you don't know what you are doing. I have no idea what effect my teaching has had on other people. I think you would have to ask the students who have been in my class, so in getting ready for today, I decided instead to think about what certain teachers have done for me, because I thought maybe I would find in there a nubbin of something that would mean a lot to those who get up and face classrooms.

Trudy mentioned that I had taught at West High for ten years. I have taught at the University for over twice that long, but I have done lots of other kinds of teaching, too--in church basements, sitting on piano benches, teaching by correspondence people who are in prison, teaching in industry, teaching men with horny hands and tractor caps who were trying to learn how to write better. I have been in lots of teaching situations. I know just from talking to some of you earlier this morning that you are teaching in grade schools, and I hope that the things that I say have meaning no matter where it is that you are teaching. So I decided to talk about some of the great teachers in my life.

One of them was Mrs. White. Mrs. White was my piano teacher from the time that I was in sixth grade until I graduated from college. She was over ninety when she stopped teaching piano. A very tall woman who wore pince-nez on her nose and hooked the glasses on as the lesson began. She was as wrinkled as a prune, but had smooth hands from practicing every day. And when you rang her bell you could sometimes hear her doing her own practicing; when you stepped into that room it was pure music. Everything else stopped. You had to do your exercises. You had to be able to do the scales from C through the six sharps and six flats. You had to be able to do the arpeggios and warmup exercises before you could do the Schubert or the Beethoven or the Chopin. What she taught me was that those fundamentals are absolutely essential, that there are certain things you have to learn to do first before you can move on to the

great things. In fact, if I had to select out one sentence that rings in my head from those days with Mrs. White, it was her looking at me and saying, "Why play page ten when you stumble on page one?" That was an important lesson, and I think it is an important part of teaching. I learned the importance of discipline, of fundamentals, of repetition and of exercise.

It turns out that my son who is here and standing back there in the white shirt had another great teacher that I was able to witness in operation. Maybe some of you have heard of her, she is Marie Endres, a violin teacher here in town who has trained an awful lot of fiddle players. She is so beloved by her students that they all just call her "Teach." One day when Erik was in high school, we went to his lesson, and I went in because I was supposed to play the piano for his lesson on the Bach double violin concerto. If you know Miss Endres, when you are learning the double violin concerto you don't just play part one or part two, you have to be able to play both parts. So the two of them got going, and I sat at the piano bench. They went through it once and Erik played part one; then they went through it a second time and Erik played part two. He looked like he was feeling pretty proud of himself, and she looked at him and said, "You did pretty well except it is not there yet, it is not Bach. How can I say it, Bach just goes - you can't stop." Then she looked at Erik, who even at that age had already developed the Schoff shoulders, he made the violin look rather small, and she said, "You Schoff (she always called her students by their last name), you Schoff, you look so much better than you sound." I thought I was off the hook--I had stumbled through the piano part one way or the other. Then she turned to me and she said, "And you, you have got a very good kid there, and he deserves a better fiddle. I hope you will get him one soon." She was a great teacher. A lot of people who play the fiddle in this town owe a lot to her, and from that lesson I learned that the composer comes first, Bach just goes, and that you can't fake it. You can't look better than you sound and you have to have the right equipment.

Another of my great teachers was a college chemistry teacher, and he was a card-carrying eccentric if there ever was one. He had sort of a snuffling manner when he talked but, oh, did he know chemistry. When he got up and started spitting out the organic symbols, I can still see where hexamethylenetetramine was on the board and how it looked in his handwriting. He managed to relieve it all with humor and make it ultimately serious at the same time. I remember running up to him after I made a mistake on an exam with a formula in biochemistry for a drug and I said "Dr. Trytten I got the decimal point in the wrong place, can I change it?" He just put his hand over the paper and he said, "Sorry, the patient is already dead." He was also the sort who would snuffle back and forth through the chemical equations, had lots of jewel-like phrases like, "Well now let's take the bull by the tail and look this thing squarely in the face." For the women in his class, and there were only two back in those days (it was mostly men in chemistry) he managed to keep things lively by giving me for my unknown in organic chemistry, butyric acid. I don't know if you know what butyric acid is, but it is the main ingredient in rancid butter. When you get it on your skin, you smell like you have slept in the pig barn for weeks. Everyone thought it was a wonderful joke.

The most important teacher of my life was my mother. She was one of twelve children, from an immigrant family that was convinced that education and learning was the way that you took possession of this country. Seven of the twelve, at one time in their lives or another, were teachers. So I grew up in a family where word games and mathematical puzzles and getting your grammar corrected were a part of daily life. The best used books in our house were the dictionary, the encyclopedias, and the World Atlas. The instruction that went with them was "look it up." But it wasn't just with books. It was with everything. There was no such thing with mother as a half scrubbed floor or a partly-raked lawn. You weren't finished at the grocery store until you had put the vegetables in the refrigerator, laid the change on the kitchen table, and had given an accounting of what each item cost and why there was that much change coming home from the grocery store. She also was a person that you could not lie to. In fact, if you tried it, you felt like you were standing in your underwear. Most importantly, she despised arrogance and pretention, what she called "getting a big head." I saw her take on someone who was enough of a friend, who knew her well enough, so that he could tolerate it. He was a local whose son was doing pretty well in athletics and the father was getting so that he crowed quite a lot in public. I saw my mother sidle up next to him one Friday night next to a men's clothing store in our downtown, and she just looked at him and said "picking out a new hat?" He looked at her, sort of puzzled, and she said "I thought you were probably shopping for one in the largest size."

What can be gleaned from these stories that I have told you about teachers? Well, I think there are some things that are as simple as the great teaching of Socrates and his pupils sitting on one end of the log or the other. The elements are just two or three, and they work no matter where you are teaching. The first of them is paying attention. Getting the students to pay attention to the teacher, and the teacher paying attention to the students. I am astonished as I walk around the University at the number of teachers who don't seem to care, who are talking to the blackboard, who have people who are slowly falling asleep in the front row over and over again. People are so bored that the teachers are literally talking to themselves without much attention to the fact that the people in front of them aren't listening, that something is askew. Sometimes I think it is just that people become bored with what they are teaching. On the other hand, I have seen many master teachers who can make anything interesting. It doesn't make any difference if they are teaching about fish scales, or rocks, or butterfly wings, or poems. They teach about something and at that moment it is the most interesting thing in the world to them. When something fascinates you, when you believe in it, when you teach that way, it is infectious. Students catch it from you. Some teachers rely on show biz, but show biz only goes so far. The show biz has to be coupled with competence, and that is why I say to teachers who are training under me, "The most important thing for you is to know your subject." Because if you have competence, students will forgive all kinds of personal idiosyncrasies. I never try to make a student teacher be a clone of myself. I always say, "Teach from your strengths, don't worry about the educational philosophy, you will figure out a way if you are interested in it and you want someone else to be interested in it." I also know that we live in an era when getting the students' attention is much harder than it was even 20 or 30 years ago, because attention spans are shrinking all of the time. Everything militates against it. The sound bite, the quick new Nintendo game, the television, the little quick clip, has

made for a very jittery generation of young people whose attention is not easy to focus. These are all the burdens that people have to face in the public school system. I think one of the biggest challenges for people who are teaching is to insist one way or another that people at this moment pay attention. You do whatever you can to get that to happen. I will admit that on occasion I have done things that were spontaneous, I certainly didn't plan them, but they got attention. I think, for example, of a student that I had in high school in a study hall who spent his entire time looking over his shoulder to see if I was watching him while he twanged a bobby pin on the edge of the desk and passed candy bars and generally raised mayhem in the classroom. One day when he looked over his shoulder to see if I was watching him, I was so frustrated that I just stuck my tongue out at him and I had his attention for the rest of the semester. It just about knocked him out of his shoes.

Besides paying attention, I think it is important for teachers to arrive at a shared language, to understand where your students are. You always have to start from there, no matter where that is, and build on it. Then learn at what point you set them free, shove them off the branch and let them go on on their own. One of the ways that you build on where students are is by means of things that mean something to them - analogies, or poetry or whatever. I have heard people explain complicated suction pumps used in ophthalmic surgery with an analogy as simple as, "Well, see, it works sort of like a soda straw." I have heard linking verbs described as being like safety pins or equal signs. I remember Mrs. White demonstrating how to play a scale, and she said, "You play it like shaking it out of your sleeve." You have to be prepared in looking for that common language for the place to stand back and be silent. I think you all know that many, many students escape you simply because you won't wait long enough for them to think. They think, "Well, if I just don't say something, she will ask somebody else and I can escape." The power of the silence, to sit there and wait, to hang on like a bulldog and say "Come on now, what do you think about it?," even though the silence becomes painful--until they can't wiggle away--is a part of the shared language. And then there always comes that point with the good students, when you just have to stand out of their way. There is probably nothing more wonderful than the student that wants it so much, that wants to learn so much, that they get better than you are in some ways, and you have to learn not to get in their way.

The shared vocabulary is very important. You have got to know the names of the parts of the body if you study anatomy, you have got to know the chemical symbols to teach chemistry, you have to know grammar if you are going to write decently. Winston Churchill said that he learned a healthy respect and a love affair with the English language by parsing sentences on the blackboard until his feet bled.

Encourage, but do not give idle praise. One of the trends that I have not liked in education is the tendency to be idly encouraging when the quality isn't there. I have seen people's refrigerators full with children's art work--where they practically are afraid to sneeze if their child had done it. I think it is a good idea to encourage, but at the same time, I think you always have to push with constructive criticism, push to the next level, not equalize everything, whether mediocre or excellent. One of the ways to do this is to choose things which are good, things which have quality. For example, teaching as

long as I have there are many books that I use year after year after year. They stand up to it because they were good in the first place. They are sort of like Cleopatra getting old. You remember Shakespeare said, "Custom cannot wither her nor age stale her infinite variety." If something is good, you can come back to it over and over and over again and it just gets deeper and deeper and deeper. I had ten years ago put two works side by side in a course by some sort of instinct, and it was only this last year that I really understood the connection between them, although I taught it for eight or nine years. All of a sudden I thought, "This is why I put those two things together," and "That is what it means." Because as you know, when you teach something you get to know it in a very different way.

So there is paying attention, there is bringing your students along to a shared language, starting where they are and bringing them up, up, up. And then there is, finally, figuring out whether you have done anything. It is called evaluation. The best evaluation is the one on one. The Miss Endres' and the Mrs. Whites of the world have no doubt, one on one, when a certain level had been reached. When you are teaching one on one, you know about progress because you are monitoring it so closely. Well I am not in that kind of situation now and most of you aren't either. I have 300 students in one class. I have 120 in another class. Most of you, I think, at a minimum probably have 20. How do you measure that? Well then you go to that precarious thing called testing. There are certain kinds of goals. But you all know, too, that there are lots of things that tests don't test, that they don't tell you the whole picture, that there are some students who are test wise and not very wise in other ways. That final element of teaching, of evaluating, is very, very long and sometimes you never know what it is that you have taught. It may be something that you never guess that you taught. Now and then I am invited back to a class reunion. I will have a student come up to me and say, "Remember when you told me . . ." I don't remember, but the student has remembered it and it made a difference. That is where I think the heart of teaching often is. In order to get around these classes of 300 or 120, one of the things that I systematically make my students do is keep a journal. I make them write something every day. There is a lot of rust in the pipes. There is a lot of stuff that is junk, but eventually they develop a voice. They begin to trust themselves. They begin to realize that what is going on in their head has meaning. When I go through those journals there is a lot of garbage, but there are some wonderful nuggets and I can see people getting stronger and stronger in what they think. Since I teach literature and writing I am a great believer in the power of writing. I think writing is one of the ways that you come to know what it is that you think. When you have to run it through a pencil, then you know what it is that you think. It is a habit I have myself. I have written something daily for, I don't know, maybe 30 years. I have yellow pads all over the house because it helps me to keep track of what is going on in my own head.

Well that's what I think goes on in the classroom. I think it is a matter of attention, of a shared language, and it is a matter of trying to arrive at some measure of whether you are moving ahead and whether something is happening.

But when I spoke with Trudy about this talk, I told her that I would also like to talk about not just getting ready for September but something a little bit bigger, which is

getting ready for life. Most students know that there is something outside that classroom. My University students know that when they walk across that graduation platform they are stepping out of one kind of safety straight into a traffic jam where everything that has been learned in all those years of school is suddenly melted together, is suddenly fused. They know that being good in school does not necessarily mean that you are going to be good in life. Certainly, we have ample and abundant evidence of people who are book smart and totally dumb about life. Just as there are illiterate mothers who are very wise in taking care of their children, there are professors who can hardly get across the street on their own. But no matter what grade you are teaching, you are really getting people ready for what Sigmund Freud called the two most important things in anyone's life. That is finding people to love and get along with, and finding work that is worth doing. It starts in kindergarten, the very first moment that a child walks into school.

I think we can learn a lot from people who have told us how they learned not to make a living, but how to make a life. In fact, one of the great joys of teaching literature is the literally thousands of records left by people who at one point or another had a crucial episode in their lives when they saw the connection between what was going on in school and something that was bigger than themselves. Ralph Waldo Emerson had it happen to him when he was a young man standing in Paris looking down into a glass case full of dried ferns. He said, "I realized that the same current that flowed for Socrates and Plato, that current called life itself, flowed for me today and that I had the power to discover it and make it my own." He called it the Doctrine of the Oversoul. Robert Jastrow, a contemporary astronomer, had it happen to him after several decades of studying the stars. Sitting on that little stool looking up at the stars night after night after night (which is bound to make you feel pretty little) looking for the right formula to explain how it all began--he said one night he suddenly came to the conclusion that another decade of formulas and mathematics would not explain the why of the stars. It could explain the how, but not the why. And he said, "If I could think of a metaphor to describe it, it would be that I had spent my professional life scaling the mountains of ignorance, climbing to the top, and I just pulled myself over the level to the top and lo and behold, there was a band of theologians who had been sitting there for centuries looking down at me."

The person on whom I rely so often to give me a sense of when the invisible meets the visible is the poet Thomas Hardy. And that is where I would like to conclude this morning. Thomas Hardy believed that everyone involved in teaching and learning is in a sense involved in trying to hook up to that sense of immensity that lurks in the back of all of us. You know when that light bulb goes on. He used the occasion of the sinking of the ship, the Titanic, as a way of describing it. It is a poem called "The Convergence of the Twain" and in the first half of the poem he describes what it is like to go down through the water and find the Titanic on the bottom of the ocean floor, gently rocking. Sea worms are crawling over the mirrors where the rich and famous had danced in the ballrooms, cold water is threading its way through the furnace rooms where the engines had beat and throbbed. Then he says he realized that for all of the wonderful products of the mind that had created the Titanic, there was something even greater that had created the iceberg. There came a moment, a crucial time when the

iceberg and the ship were brought together in a kind of cataclysmic collision, which he calls the convergence of the twain, and that collision, I think, is the light bulb that ought to be in the back of all teaching and learning. Listen to the end of that poem on the convergence of the twain.

Well: while was fashioning
This creature of cleaving wing,
The Immanent Will that stirs and urges everything

Prepared a sinister mate
For her--so gaily great--
A Shape of Ice, for the time far and dissociate

And as the smart ship grew
In stature, grace, and hue,
In shadowy silent distance grew the Iceberg too.

Alien they seemed to be:
No mortal eye could see
The intimate welding of their later history,

Or sign that they were bent
By paths coincident
On being anon twin halves of one august event,

Till the Spinner of the Years
Said "Now!" And each one hears,
And consummation comes, and jars two hemispheres.

I wish you a good teaching year. I wish you the turning on of light bulbs because it goes on not only in the classroom but all through life, and I hope that somewhere, either coming from a student or sending out to a student, at least once this year, you jar two hemispheres.

Prof. Gretchen Schoff



If you knew Prof. Schoff, we would like to ask you to share your experiences in writing . . .

Prof. Schoff was a mentor, friend, advisor, associate and teacher to many. Before her sudden illness and death last summer, she taught highly-acclaimed courses in Integrated Liberal Studies, Environmental Studies, and Engineering Professional Development. As a memorial for her made clear, she was deeply loved and admired for her ability to function as both a formidable scholar *and* a compassionate human being. People were impressed at the wide range of people she had mentored, and most felt bemused that they really didn't know important facets of her story.

In hopes that the *ways* and *lessons* of this masterful teacher are not lost, the idea arose that we should collect and compile them. She put her best into others, and we have much to learn from her yet.

All that is asked is for those of you who have something *specific* to share to tell your story by writing it down and sending it in, preferably with your name, position, address, and telephone number. We may need to contact you for copyrighting and sending the compilation, but can leave you anonymous if indicated. The anecdotes or observations should be concise -- as if you were writing *for* Gretchen as well as *about* her -- and in a *final form* suitable for publication. Some pieces may require other formats. Several short parables may work better than one long piece. The object is to share aspects of Gretchen that you think others may learn from or enjoy, and show the range of her influence. First-hand stories are preferable. We may try to put together a booklet once we see what we have. The Schoff family has expressed a great interest in this project. Published or not, these words you send would be a treasure to the Schoffs and all those who admired Gretchen.

The deadline is June 10, 1995. Please send to:

Steve Slack, Integrated Liberal Studies
228 North Charter, Meiklejohn House,
University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI 53706
Phone: (608) 263-3964
E-Mail: ils@macc.wisc.edu

* * * Please Feel Free To Copy This And Spread The Word * * *

Gretchen's Smile

It would be impossible to address, with any degree of completeness, Gretchen's life, accomplishments, relationships, or personality. Instead, I wish to share only some reflections on Gretchen's smile.

I feel very much like one of the last group of the laborers in the vineyard, in that, though I had not known Gretchen as long as most of the others, I was allowed to share in the grace of Gretchen's smile.

Gretchen's office on the second floor of Meiklejohn House faced the hallway through which all the ILS Teaching Assistants have to pass in order to get to their own offices. Gretchen, however, was not easily distracted, and usually did not look up as you passed, unless you stopped to speak with her. As I came to know Gretchen, I would more and more often stop. And she would more and more often smile.

But, as Steve Slack has reminded me, Gretchen, ever with pen in hand, would complete whatever thought she was on before she acknowledged her visitor. When she had finished, Gretchen would then turn slowly toward me and, as her eyes met mine, smile in a way that, I imagine, was much like the way Jay Gatsby smiled. "[Sh]e smiled", to borrow from Fitzgerald,

understandingly--much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced--or seemed to face--the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just as far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself, and assured you that it had precisely the impression of you that, at your best, you hoped to convey (48).

Behind and in Gretchen's smile was, however, much more than a social gesture or a pleasant courtesy. Behind and in this smile, behind and in this redeeming energy which reflected the greatest of our potential, there was a tough-minded, individualistic, and humanistic woman, who cared deeply about serious political, social, and environmental issues. Behind and in this smile was a Renaissance woman whose range of talents and specialties surely intimidated all of us, an educator esteemed by her students as one of the very best on this campus (but one who was firm in her insistence that student's honor their half of the educational contract). What I am trying to say was that her smile was to me an honor. What I am also trying to say is that Gretchen's smile was to me a gift that reminded me that, above all academic or worldly achievements, the most important, most memorable part of our lives is the way we touch one another with our irresistible humanity.

I proudly relate that there was one exception to Gretchen's extraordinary concentration at her desk at Meiklejohn House. On those times I would bring my daughter Maria to the office, Gretchen would wheel her chair toward Maria, lower her head so that they could be eye-to-eye, and greet her with a comfortable smile. Maria, who has always had a proper degree of diffidence towards adults, would return Gretchen's smile, and the two of them would exchange words and glances before we moved on.

In these exchanges I saw the secret of Gretchen's success: when she did anything, she did it whole-heartedly. By giving her full attention to whatever the task was, she made us feel worthy, confident, human.

One of Gretchen's favorite poets was Emily Dickinson, and in an article that she wrote on the Sistine Chapel, Gretchen quoted Dickinson's line that "Art lifts the top off your head." That is, art allows us to think in new ways, explore new possibilities, try on new thoughts, in order that we may re-invent the world around us. In much the same way, Gretchen's smile, which had no artifice in it, but only sincerity, lifted the veil to my soul, to our souls. And through her life, I have, we have, come to see our work, our world, and our selves "begin to stir", as Gretchen put it, "with possibility" ("Resurrection" 7).

6/26/95

Steve,

I realized when I left for vacation a week and a half ago that I hadn't given this to you. If you still have time to include it, I would be honored to have you do so. I really hope that the project goes well. As Gretchen was one of the rare people who affected us all in very positive ways, she deserves to be remembered well.

All the Best,

Gerard. Ne castro, DLS/English
Gerard

I knew Gretchen for more than 20 years. Of course, her reputation preceded her: more than 30 years ago, when I was a student at West High, I knew that the luckiest of kids got Mrs. Schoff for English. Ten years later, when I was a graduate student in search of a teaching assistantship, Herb Howe suggested I go see Gretchen, who was then in charge of the ILS "Approaches to Knowledge" course. I jumped at the chance, and, armed with little more than some part-time editing experience and a love of the English language, went to interview for the job of teaching freshmen to write and think clearly.

Fortunately for me, Gretchen was looking less for credentials and more for what she later described as "live wires," and there began an association that for me has been rewarding beyond measure. When Gretchen won permission to develop a Technical Writing course in the College of Engineering, she asked me to help with it. The next year, I was hired as an Assistant Professor to teach it, and I stayed on more or less for 13 years. During that time, I came to know Gretchen as a colleague and friend: we taught courses and seminars together, collaborated on a book, and talked about everything on earth.

I miss much about Gretchen, but perhaps most of all, her delight in language. She was, of course, an accomplished writer and poet, but what I miss most is the fun with words. We both liked to work the crossword puzzles in the *Atlantic* magazine. For those of you unfamiliar with these, they are not ordinary crosswords: the clues are cryptic, full of puns and anagrams. You can chew on a clue for days. We would check our progress with each other, asking (to the bafflement of our colleagues) "Did you get 'soprano is swallowing soft drinks' yet?" I remember seeing her face suddenly light up

as she solved a particularly obstinate clue, especially if she got it before her sister, with whom she had an ongoing friendly competition.

She also loved the unintended gaffes produced when people write without regard to the rules of grammar and syntax. Gretchen was fond of quoting from a note she had seen posted on the bulletin board at ILS: "Lost, one fountain pen, by a freshman filled with green ink." When our offices were next door to each other, we would occasionally relieve the tedium of grading endless papers by popping next door to share some gem culled from this week's crop of student writing. Just a couple of weeks ago, I noticed a particularly egregious mistake in a photo caption in my local paper, the *Mount Horeb Mail*, and thought to myself, "I'll have to clip that out for Gretchen." It is still so difficult to imagine the world without her in it.

Yet the world bears her mark indelibly in the connections she made. Gretchen built her career on the premise that everything is related, a premise that is clearly manifested in her work in the university community. But it is even more clearly shown in the magnificent variety of her connections with people. More than anyone I have ever known, Gretchen was interested in everything—and all sorts of people. She knew the life story of the waitress at the Dunk or Dine, where she often lunched, and the fact that an intensely pragmatic university administrator was also an accomplished musician. Gretchen's unfailing and genuine curiosity made her very easy to talk to. She really wanted to know what made people tick.

Gretchen also made connections between people. After I left the university and

joined the police department, I got to know one of my fellow officers when she told me she'd made a traffic stop near Perkins on University Avenue late one night and the driver knew me. It was Gretchen, of course. I told the officer, "I'll bet you stopped her because she was driving too slowly." I was right. Those connections continue even now. When I spoke with Charlie Anderson about this memorial, I remembered something Gretchen had told me years ago: that he and I shared a favorite author: Nevil Shute. We had a delightful conversation about his books, thanks to Gretchen.

Gretchen's curiosity and interest in everything around her kept her active on an amazing variety of projects at a pace I found exhausting just to think about. As most of you know, she would sit at Perkins writing until the wee hours, and then be ready to teach the next morning. I don't know when she slept. At her funeral, I remarked to a friend that it seemed as if Gretchen had packed 90 years' worth of living into her almost 64 years of life. She lived fully in the present moment and spent freely of her energy.

In one of the last conversations I had with Gretchen, we were talking about her Oriental rug collection—an abiding passion for her. In my new awareness as a police officer of the frequency of burglaries, I asked if the collection was insured. She said it was not, and I started to chide her a bit. She laughed, and said, "But for what I'd pay for insurance, I could buy another rug!" That's how she lived her life. If she had it to do over again, I doubt if she'd change a thing. We should all be so lucky.

Poems and Prose

I remember coming into Gretchen's office after a profoundly frustrating and disappointing conversation with my brother, who was also a colleague of ours. Gretchen was well aware of how he and I had been missing connections for years, no doubt to his frustration as well as my own. She listened intently, leaning forward in her office chair, as I voiced a little of my disappointment. I didn't say much; I was always a bit reserved with Gretchen. I knew how perceptive she was, and I valued her good opinion so much that I guess I feared she'd see too much. But she saw anyway, and with a hint of fire in her eye, said, "He hurt you, didn't he?" I shrugged it off as unimportant, but a day or so later, I slipped in and laid a poem on her desk.

She read it, slowly. Then she looked up, her face wreathed in that incredibly warm smile of hers, and said, "Well, at least you got a poem out of it!"

I considered that high praise, for I rarely write poetry. I am much more at home in prose. Poetry is too oblique: one cannot systematically design it, the way one can develop an outline for a prose piece. It's not linear: images come out of nowhere, seemingly, or don't come at all. Prose is much more manageable. But this time prose would not do. Some things cut too deep.

Afterwards, I went happily back to writing prose, especially straightforward, technical sorts of prose. When Gretchen and I collaborated, I was the one who tidied up the outlines and made sure we had been consistent in our use of terms. Gretchen once remarked that she felt as if I were following her around with a broom, sweeping up the

loose ends. Maybe so, but it was she who put the life and vividness into the books and seminars we produced. My writing and lecturing tends to be, well...prosaic.

So it took another event that cut deep to push me into poetry again. This time, the poem did not take form in a day or two. I wrestled with page after page of drafts to nowhere. Words can be so obstinate. More than once, I found myself at an impasse, thinking, "Damn it, Gretchen, what do I do now?" And somehow, felt her smiling. She never would tell me how to solve a writing problem, even though she knew full well what needed to be done. She would just read over what I'd written, make a comment or two, then hand it back with full confidence that I would find a solution.

And of course, eventually I did, even this time. And along the way, somehow the pain became transformed, and once again, I got a poem out of it.

Words

The night wears on; and still I wake,
Too spent to weep, or pace, or rage, nor
Can I sleep, for pictures fill my mind:
All out of order, incomplete,
Like snapshots jumbled in a drawer.

You at your desk, the page before you
And your face in bright relief, while all
Around, the room is shadowed, indistinct.
A single gooseneck lamp beside your head
Wraps light around you like a shawl.

Or turning now, you read a line aloud:
Syntax tangled, image gone astray
To some absurd and unexpected end.

Your laughter tumbles out like children
From a school bus, eager for their play.

Then turning back, you mark the errant text,
Choosing words with gentleness and skill,
So not to wound, but yet to chide,
Your smile lingers as you write.
I hear your laughter still.

But laughter's stilled, and pictures fade.
I wait for dawn.

I find two poems that you wrote
And seize upon them, as a sailor cast
Adrift at sea, in desperate futile lunge,
Might grasp at some forgotten rope
That trails behind a ship already past.

One spoke of hope rekindled
After a season filled with pain.
The next of promise: flesh and blood
Made whole once more from bread and wine.
A midnight miracle enacted once again.

In the beginning was the Word.
In the end, the words remain.

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As I thought about what I should say today my mind kept circling around the word beauty. It is not completely clear to me why--perhaps it has something to do with the last three pages of the story, "A River Runs Through It." At any rate, I would like to share a few personal thoughts about what I see as the beauty within Gretchen, and the sense of beauty she instilled in others.

When I say that Gretchen was beautiful, I am using that description in the way that it applies to the unique whole of every life, from birth to death--that story that is worthy of attention and wonder. There are many features particular to Gretchen's beauty. I think in part of her magnificent voice, her often uncanny precision of words, and her large eyes that seemed not only to register a momentary expression or comment but to absorb the whole being of a person.

But most of all, I think of three interrelated qualities that, in my mind, made her a remarkable person and a remarkable teacher. One was her pride, pride defined not as enlarged ego but as something closer to what Isak Dinesen had in mind when she wrote that "pride is faith in the idea that God had, when he made us." No matter what momentary event or mishap that might throw her off balance--such as misplaced lecture notes or an unraveling hem in her dress--there was always about Gretchen an unassailable sense of who she was and what she was about.

At the same time, I have met few other people who could so completely set aside their own thoughts and concerns and turn their attention to others. She was rare among teachers in her ability to listen to and truly appreciate the insights of her students. Students deeply valued her thoughts and she, in turn, was keenly interested in whatever new territory her students would lead her into. This reciprocal respect between teacher and student resulted in a rich, ongoing conversation that continues even now--at least for me--beyond her death.

In addition, Gretchen's beauty stems in great part from her ability to relate her career and personal goals with her commitments to her family, community, and students. Many have commented on Gretchen's exceptional ability to see and understand the relationships between diverse areas of knowledge; even more exceptional to me was her inner compass which was always able to relate abstract academic topics to the day-to-day realm of the human heart.

Gretchen also instilled a sense of beauty in others. She showed her students, as much by example as by any other means, how to strive for the possibilities of beauty within themselves. Another graduate student of Gretchen's, Michele Miller, spoke for all of us, I think, when she wrote that what she learned from Gretchen "was better how to wield words in the service of love."

Lastly, it seems to me very important to point out that Gretchen encouraged her students to become more acutely aware of the beauty outside of themselves, the beauty in their surroundings. In her IES course, Environmental Studies: the Humanistic Perspective, she sought, in part, to teach students, primarily through literature, that a sense of beauty is critical to establishing a binding relationship to our environment. Literature, for example, can show us how the patterns in a river like the Big Blackfoot can reflect the patterns in a person's life, and how the mysteries of a river's beginning are ultimately as unfathomable as those we love. This sense of beauty is something more than a naive appreciation of pretty colors and forms, although that is an important beginning. It is instead that deeper understanding of what gives meaning and joy to our lives, an understanding arrived at on the far side of pain and sorrow. And while this sense of beauty is informed by the insights of science and the realities of economics, it is nonetheless insistent that all the knowledge and all the material comforts in the world are pointless without those transporting moments where, to borrow the words of Willa Cather, we are "dissolved into something complete and great."

Gretchen wrote about one of those transporting moments in "Going to the Wolf Howl", a poem that describes a conversation between humans and wolves which occurred across the darkness of a winter night. This is the last stanza:

Remarkable, the wolves and we,
Whirled along a gyre,
Set down upon a breathing ball
In galaxies of fire,
Improbably alive,
Together, yet alone,
In emptiness expanding
Where moons are ice and stone.


The waitress greeted Gretchen with easy familiarity and swooshed coffee into our cups. Once we were alone, we eagerly exchanged inquiries and comments concerning the goings and comings of family, a newly discovered book, the irritations of a backache, the prospects of the day's weather. As we spoke I sank into the cushioned curves of the booth seat and rested my hands on the table's cool linoleum surface. A warmth filled the room. People talked softly in the booths nearby and the morning sun reflected off the walls.

Off to Gretchen's right a man stood next to one of the booths adjacent to the wall. He was alone. He shuffled nervously in place and spoke to himself; his eyes glancing down and then off into the far distance as if he were waiting for a city bus. He was middle-aged, slender, and the loose skin of his cheeks gave his face a worn, vacant look. Not long after we sat down, he approached our booth.

He stopped next to Gretchen and addressed her in a confidential tone. He rambled on for some time about sales and purchases, and travels from town to town. His narrative was disjointed, at times completely incomprehensible. Despite this, Gretchen listened unhurriedly, raptly, as if the man were giving a skilled recitation of her favorite poem. Her manner with him confirmed what I had always suspected: she gave her complete attention to others without regard to rank or status or personal fortune.

When he had gone, she turned to me and half-smiled. "He's a little out there, but he's perfectly harmless," she remarked in her resonant voice. "A regular...he just likes having someone to talk to."

Department of Engineering Professional Development

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May 26, 1995

Professor Steve Slack
Integrated Liberal Studies
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University of Wisconsin-Madison
Madison, WI 53706

Dear Steve:

Professor Gretchen Schoff made a significant impact on the quality and popularity of Engineering and Professional Development's continuing education programs. Her teaching prowess is well documented in the fifteen years of evaluation sheets turned in by her students in my programs.

I had the good fortune of listening to many of Gretchen's lectures in my Product Safety programs on the "Role of Warnings and Instructions". Her evaluations were "always" outstanding. She had a special gift for presenting difficult material in an interesting, humorous and attractive manner.

The elegance of her presentations quickly became apparent to her audience. She was one of the few instructors that participants would go out of their way personally to tell me, what an extraordinary teacher she was.

Her conscientiousness and sense of responsibility as a teacher were made evident to me in many ways. Once, during the time her speaking engagement coincided with the sudden and inexplicable loss of her hair, she still insisted on speaking and handled the situation in a remarkable way, putting everyone at ease. Professor Schoff-the consummate teacher once again.

May 26, 1995

Professor Steven Slack

Page 2

On a more personal note, Gretchen was one of the best listeners I have ever known. She made you feel comfortable in sharing personal feelings that were made easier to convey, because of the breadth of her understanding. These conversations always left me with thoughts to ponder, and a sense of well being that is difficult to describe. I will miss this about her most of all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dick Moll".

Richard A. Moll
Professor

dl

A consistent message in Gretchen Schoff's teachings can be summed up in two words "Be yourself." For a major assignment for the humanities and the environment course, a commonplace book, she advised students not to set up obstacles to the process of self-discovery by succumbing to the temptation to force an analysis or affect an uncomfortable writing style. The suggestions for the commonplace book did not provide a preset format. Students who had abilities in the visual arts could combine their written observations with photographs or sketches. Others could engage in field observation or creative writing. In her instruction sheet for the exercise she advised:

"If you ask questions about length of this assignment, you have misunderstood the assignment. This is your place to talk to yourself and keep a record of what you think about nature and the environment. Use it and enjoy it...Do not feel constrained to become a poet or novelist for this assignment. Be yourself."

A key focus of her course was getting students to look at interconnections in the natural world from a personal perspective. In order to do so, they needed to acquire the proper tools. As her handout suggested, taking on the task of personal expression required focus and discipline, but it also provided an opportunity for adventure. She believed that each

student could discover aspects about his or her own experiences within the natural world that could enhance that individual's creative abilities—just as many Native Americans believe that the natural elements that are transformed into an object of art impart a spirit to the finished product. At a time in students' lives when coping with the day-to-day strain of academic life could become overwhelming, she was able to get many of them to understand the need for personal expression as a means of drawing out the spiritual qualities that provide balance in an uneven world. Through the commonplace book exercise, she was able to steer the students to focus not just on the task at hand, but to look at their creative interactions as an ongoing work in progress.

The end result of the exercise was an astonishing output of creative effort. It was a delight to pour through the students' commonplace books, and a privilege to share their otherwise private observations. Over the years, the exercise elicited numerous creative stories and poems, photo essays, original paintings, and even an impressively choreographed dance.

One Christmas Gretchen gave me a bound journal with lined paper that she picked up on her trip to China. It was an unspoken invitation to share in the process that she enjoyed and so skillfully encouraged her students to participate in. During the time I was teaching with her, I did not take

up the challenge of that empty book. Almost ten years after I received that book, I am beginning to more fully understand the importance of those blank pages, and I intend to fill them.



Cornelia Ann Burr
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Gretchen Schoff

Let me reflect on my personal experiences with Gretchen which stem from our common bond with Bethel Lutheran Church and our work relationship in the College of Engineering.

On this day we stand back praising God for the gift of Gretchen. We are here because we loved her. She gave us a glimpse of what she called 'the High and Holy.' With her special gifts she made us look beyond ourselves and inside ourselves. In that sense her probing was uplifting; it helped many of us to find out who we are and where we should go. In this way, without us even noticing, she was serving us and leading us at the same time. How much we miss her.

Gretchen truly made it possible that I am here today. It was over ten years ago, on a hot afternoon early in August, after several months of walk-in interviewing at the university and just a couple of days before a three-week camping trip with our own three children and two lively little nephews from Germany—I did NOT want to take another phone call anymore. When the phone rang, my ten year old took the call anyway—lucky me. That afternoon Gretchen asked me if I was still interested in teaching technical writing; I would start in September—becoming one of her colleagues.

There was little time to prepare. So Gretchen took it on herself to be my mentor. I remember sitting in her morning class and then teaching myself in the afternoon. She made learning and teaching engineering students exciting for me to this day. She backed up every concept with real-world cases. She did not tolerate purple prose. And, being a non-native English speaker, I marveled about her use of metaphors, the ones from the farm, about muck, and putting cart before the horse, and trimming the fat of the writing. And her students loved that earthiness also. In our small writing sections, her acute listening skills brought out the best in the students. Early in the semester, she'd wait for two minutes, if necessary, to get a response, and then the discussions just flowed. During one of our mentoring sessions after class she said what I felt: Isn't it wonderful to keep learning every day, and even get paid for it? Gretchen was practical also.

We always appreciated her wise counsel at staff meetings in the department and in complicated college matters. Our department was unusual in the College of Engineering in the sense that we had almost as many women as men on the staff, while the other departments had one woman if any at all. One day after a heated session she offered this comment, with a broad smile: The decision making should be left to us women. We'd get sensible results so much faster and with less pain.

Three things stand out to me in how Gretchen worked, not only in technical communication but also in other areas. As we all know, she loved that razor sharp edge of language, the tool of the mind. Then, she loved the soft touch of rhythms and patterns that go to the heart, she liked paisley, not plaid. And she loved earthiness, creatures of flesh and blood—like strong men of Skandinavian background—all part of creation. She understood to weave these three themes together in a thousand different patterns, like in the tapestries on her walls in her home.

I cannot help but think of her work in the Bethel choir. She was so proud to sing tenor! Larry Kelliher, the choir director, would often call on her to come up front and explain the meaning of words to the singers so they would sing with more expression. One of her favorite pieces was: When rooks fly homeward...and evening shadows fall... and the quiet of Christ is by me... Well, Larry, exasperated with the flat sound of the choir that day, asked her to please explain how rooks *really* fly. Who could do it better!. With her deep warm voice, she explained very precisely the setting of the song in southern England. A rook is a bird much like a crow...not like a raven... and they come home to roost at sunset... That song will *remain* special to the choir.

At another time she was composing poems for a set of greeting cards, one for each month of the year. Since I am into computer publishing, we talked about how she could add color on the computer and if we could print the limited edition on a laser printer. In the end she opted for adding water colors by hand, the soft touch, the personal.

Her card for October has this verse in the upper left-hand corner:

Golden maple kites afloat,
Green sheaves gone to copper-bronze
Ducks in drifting ritual,
Bittersweet, wrinkling orange—
Beauty's in retreat.

And then the parallel words about our relationship with God in the lower right:
Here she calls Him

Inventor of the Wheel of Life:

Steady center, in the midst
Of earth's turning,
Show us how to live
With loss and death,
With drift and endings.

Gretchen was well prepared for her journey to resurrection. On the card, the verse wraps around the spokes of the Wheel of Life which are colored like the rainbow.

The High and Holy, a recurring theme in her writing, meant to her in part integrating the mind, the heart, and the earthiness and flesh. She felt blessed to have all these attributes so wonderfully mingled in her family. I haven't seen her excited very often, but she was when she told me about her son Eric being accepted as resident ophthalmologist in Indiana. There he would deal with the astonishing detail of the eye, razor sharp precision, the mind unlocking the mystery of sight. She could admire that. And—there is Soren, she would say with a broad smile, and her voice would grow warm with softness. He is the poet in the family, she said, like you *need* a poet in your family; you need a poet like a soul. Another time, we met at the sports banquet for the swimmers of West High School; Kell her third son was applauded by the entire team when he got up to receive the team's award for the most improved freshmen. Her eyes sparkled with joy. She liked strong men of Scandinavian background.

Family and deep personal relationships were important for of Gretchen in her quest for the High and Holy. I have the feeling it was being married to Keith that sparked her interest in technical communication. Keith, a patent lawyer, knows about the power of words but is also a hands-on engineer. He fixed up all those 'armored tanks' that Gretchen drove. In turn, Gretchen also tried to subdue technical things with her own hands—she was so proud when she showed us her first IBM computer at home. But enough is enough—at night she would cover that computer with a cloth so it wouldn't intrude into the quiet.

During her last two years Gretchen tried to live her vision at a still more personal level. There wasn't so much time anymore for technical writing because she had to write down those tapestries upwelling from her soul and from her conversations with God. And she had to share more time with Keith. She wasn't available for lunch meetings because there were more important lunches, lunches with Keith. We are grateful for that. And we are grateful that she let us share in her quest. For many of us, she was a true mentor.

Prepared by Gisela Kutzbach
Adjunct Assistant Professor
Department of Engineering Professional Development
October 14, 1994

#198 26-MAY-1995 17:56:12.31

Number: 198
 From: IN%"annie@unbc.edu" "Annie Booth"
 To: ils@macc.wisc.edu
 Subject: Gretchen stories
 Lines: 65
 Time: 26-MAY-1995 17:56:12.31
 Folder: MAIL
 Replied: No

Hi Steve,

Given the Canadian postal system, this is faster. Here are a couple of stories:

In IES 113, I learned about suitable student motivation by a professor. When a student showed up and informed his TA that he had missed his exam for the second time the TA took him down to talk with Gretchen. When

Gretchen heard the student's explanation, "I just forgot", she leaned over, grabbed him by both ears, pulled him right up to her face and said, quite loudly, "HOW could you be that silly." The student never missed another deadline.

I had to ask her once for a letter of recommendation for a scholarship I was applying for. Even though her father had just been admitted to hospital (and died soon after) she worked the next morning writing it, and drove it down to me herself, to make a short deadline. Her reason: "These things are so vital to people's lives." She really cared.

When I defended my Ph.D. thesis, she worked all the day before baking treats for the committee, "To put them in the proper mood." Having finished, she went to choir practice, leaving everything on the kitchen counter. Two hungry sons and a husband arrived shortly after, and promptly ate everything down to one cookie. She apologized throughly about the Ovens of Brittany bailout, however I passed my defence anyway.

When I came down to talk with people before entering graduate school, she tried to put me off. She even told the professor who had agreed to take me on, that she didn't think I was a good risk. I started anyway. A year later my advisor showed her some of my work. She thought about it awhile and then said, "Annie's different, but now I think it's a good different." She was unswerving in her support ever after. Writing always counted with Gretchen.

Talk with you when I get to wisconsin, Steve.

Annie Booth
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E-Mail>



HENRY KENDALL COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES

June 14, 1995

Steve Slack
Integrated Liberal Studies
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Madison, WI 53706

Dear Steve,

I returned from a short family vacation in Minnesota to find your letter. I think you're involved in a very worth-while project and I will be extremely interested in the results but I don't feel that I have anything substantial to add to it. I knew Gretchen for such a short time really and I expect that anything I could say about her will be better said by others who worked longer and closer with her than I did. I have not forgotten her though and do not expect I will. We talked about supreme court justices and cranes and I always meant to buy her book and ask her to sign it. If my experience with her was typical, she was genuinely interested in learning what other people think. She was intelligent, rather than merely intellectual, and an intriguingly calm and personable presence in the not so calm and personable worlds of academic and environmental politics. Her judgment was very good and I suspect that much of her interest and success in teaching sprang from her ability to help others improve theirs. I think she was more than a bit old-fashioned and I still wonder why she once told me I was "decorative."

So, that about sums it up. Good luck and I hope you're nearing the finish line with your dissertation.

Alexa Larson-Thorisch
email: larsonak@centum.utulsa.edu

Memoriam: Gretchen Schoff

7/14/94

You ask for words.

My major professor died this week. She, too, asked for words. Her pastor read at her funeral, "In the beginning, there was the Word," directly linking love with one's statement of intent. I've spent my life often mistrusting words or re-interpreting them so they made sense to me (and did so throughout the entire church service).

Poetry is so appealing because it provides an unfinished image to the reader, allowing room for personal interpretation and growth—an opportunity to find the "God" or love within to connect with the other and finish the thought. Gretchen was a woman of words, but what I shared with her was primarily nonverbal. And what I learned from her was better how to wield words in the service of love. She is still helping me become aware of the suffering inflicted though miscommunication of intent. I think both Gretchen and I operate from the premise that every one of us begins with the primary intent to love. Love and suffering continue to encompass the realm of human experience, while words carry the alchemical power to transform one into the other.

Despite the urgings of the pastor, I did not cry for Gretchen's passing and I do not see death as an enemy to be conquered or persuaded. I cried to release the hurt of words spoken in haste, fear, anger, frustration, hate. I cried so I could dump this baggage and better speak from my heart. I can't afford to carry fears of words mis-spoken any longer. With Gretchen gone, who will speak to lecture-rooms full of searching 20-year-olds? Who will write in defense of the Cranes? Who will commit to speak this common language of love?

(If not me, who? If not now, when?)

—Michelle Miller

(Gretchen Schoff was a professor at UW-Madison with joint appointments in Engineering, Integrated Liberal Studies, and the Institute for Environmental Studies. Female major professors are very hard to come by, and Gretchen was a top pick, male or female. The campus community is holding a memorial for her on October 14 from 3:30-5:00 pm in Music Hall.)

Remembering Gretchen

My memories of Gretchen go back to the year when "Miss Holstein" brought a refreshing excitement to the English staff at West High. A beginner back then, she was excited, too, about her first school, her venture into a profession she loved from the first, and her enthusiasm immediately evoked accolades from her lucky students. From that year all through Gretchen's career, those "kids" had similar comments: "Wow! Have we got a great teacher!"

Student language changes, but their words like "awesome" or "incredible" describe what happened to them in Gretchen's classes. She was no ordinary teacher, and they knew it. Her breadth of knowledge led them to want to know; her hard work sparked them to work harder than they thought they could; and above all, her sincere regard for them won their respect, their awareness of the special qualities that mark the truly gifted and dedicated teacher.

Some of this I know because soon after she came to West I particularly asked that my son might be one of those lucky students. It can be hard to have a colleague's child in class, but Gretchen was easy with the arrangement and my son loved both class and teacher. She had a special power to inspire young writers, and during those years when she sponsored the school's literary magazine, Patterns in Print, students valued a spot in it as they might a position on the football team. Like many parents, I thank Gretchen. I also thank her for a kind of mutual exchange a little later, when her sister Betty came into my class as a practice teacher and gave us still another wonderful association.

Gretchen and I were colleagues twice -- first at West for eight years, and later when, like many of our students, we both "transferred" down the street to become faculty members at the University. There again we shared -- never enough, for time was full, short. Every now and then we'd meet for lunch, some personal talk -- books, education, what was happening at the "U" and in our lives. Always, those were times of enrichment. And we continued to share old and new friends, and sometimes losses. Gretchen, Marian Kanable and I one winter spent an occasional evening reading poetry together -- old favorites and new discoveries, and a few of our own tentative efforts. Our calls and letters helped us both when M. K. died. We once had a birthday party for Jane Austen, honoring also our friend Florence, a devoted Janeite whom we later grieved together. Little things -- but lasting meaning.

2-

Good memories are perhaps the best compliment. Well, here are two. Never once did I hear in our high school years that Gretchen had even the slightest discipline problem! I don't think one ever occurred in her classes. Now that's a tribute! And unforgettable for me is Gretchen's speaking voice. She sang beautifully, but her speaking voice too had a special quality. Hers was a contralto with a soft warmth-- a 'cello voice; and hearing it over the telephone, in a group, in a lecture hall, one listened, always wanting to hear more.

Joyce S. Steward
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A REMEMBRANCE

OF

GRETCHEN SCHOFF

Gretchen and I were friends for more than 30 years. We taught together at West High School from 1958 to 1963. After she left West to teach at the University, we remained good friends.

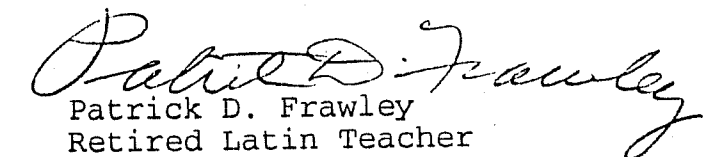
Gretchen never changed basically in all the years I knew her. She became a highly respected scholar, but she was always the interesting and interested young girl from Stevens Point.

Her entire family was very important to her. In West High days, we often had coffee at the Pharm on State and Lake where Gretchen then lived. She would entertain us with her mother's clever letters. Once, when she and her sister Betty were dieting, her mother, who was opposed, told them not to, and reminded them that they were draught horses, not race horses.

Gretchen's three sons each took Latin for four years. I enjoyed having the boys very much. They were inquisitive, bright and humorous just like their mother. Gretchen showed her strong support for West High School. She never missed a "Go to School Night" in 15 years.

When I retired in June 1992, Gretchen asked to say a few words at the Latin Honor Society Banquet. She paid me a greatly appreciated tribute. It was so typical of Gretchen to celebrate a high point in someone else's life with humor and kind words.

Having Gretchen for a good friend all these years was a blessing in my life. I will not forget her.


Patrick D. Frawley
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Prof. Gretchen Schoff

I first knew Gretchen long ago when she taught my daughter in West High School. My daughter had been a competent and conscientious student, but in Gretchen's class in literature she lit up like a Roman candle. When I met Gretchen at the school she seemed not much older than my daughter and I remember thinking that here must be a born teacher.

If I had never seen her again I would have remembered her with gratitude. But over the years our paths crossed in the normal course. For many years we have been members of the same book club. For a number of years I read all she wrote for the International Crane Foundation. And not long ago I was pleased that she not only took the time to read some poems of mine I had put together in a pamphlet but to share some comments on them.

Certainly her warm and outgoing personality and wide ranging interests played a major role in her teaching. But for me the telling clue to her success both in her life and in her teaching is revealed in some lines from a poem by Wm. Carlos Williams that she kept near her desk at home.

It is difficult
To get the news from poems
Yet men die miserably every day
For lack
Of what is found there.

Surely Gretchen got the "news" from poems and also from her varied fields of scholarship, but also she evidently opened doors for many of her students that they didn't even know were there. My daughter in High School learned that Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" was much more than a story or a piece of literature one was supposed to know. Gretchen's own interest in the International Crane Foundation was not only because the birds were fascinating and endangered worldwide, but that the work of the Foundation brought rare and valuable contacts with individuals of distant and unfamiliar cultures, bound together in a common goal.

I suspect that her students learned from her that facts alone, in whatever field, are never entities by themselves but that they must make connections far beyond their immediate appearance if they are to come alive. Surely all of us who knew her will remember that what matters most must be sought with care, patience and an open mind.

Agnes Brodie
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Former occupations: Bookshop owner, Children's books
Education
University Connection: Abner Brodie, Prof. of Law
(deceased)

Gretchen Schoff - A Loving Human Being

Written by Robert E. Forbess

Gretchen Schoff has been widely characterized as a friend, mentor, advisor, teacher, role-model and confidant. She was all of these but the special way she touched people's lives with love and compassion was her most distinguishing characteristic that set her apart from the crowd. The following story will illustrate the point.

In the spring of 1994, one of Gretchen's friends, Gerry Naeseth, was rapidly deteriorating with terminal cancer. Gerry was very realistic about his situation, but as the end drew near, he was asked if he would like to have several of his closest friends stay with him for support. He was very pleased at that suggestion so a list of people was drawn up and schedules were set so he would have someone with him at all times. Gretchen was one of these special people. I remember calling her the day before she was to stay with Gerry and I asked if she really wanted to be part of this, knowing that we would soon lose our friend. After thinking for a moment, she replied that she would count it a privilege to participate and help in this special way. She was scheduled to be at the nursing home at 6:00 p.m. and to remain with Gerry until 8:00 p.m., when another friend would take over. I had spent most of the day there myself and knew how important it was to hold his hand and give him water when he asked for it. At 7:15 p.m., Gretchen called me from the nursing home to say that Gerry had just passed away and that no further scheduling of friends was needed. I immediately drove to the home and met Gretchen in the hall outside our friend's room. She sobbed as I embraced her and tried to thank her for being there. She responded by thanking me for thinking of her and asking her to share in the drama of her friend's passing.

One month later, Gretchen was stricken and taken from us. Whether she knew all that was taking place is not clear, but one thing is certain. She too was surrounded with the love and concern of family and friends who had learned something about the meaning of caring for each other from Gretchen herself.

JUDITH STRASSER

ON READING DESCARTES' ERROR

I see feelings as having a truly privileged status. . . . [F]eelings have a say on how the rest of the brain and cognition go about their business. Their influence is immense.

Neurologist Antonio R. Damasio

The words make me want to send you his book, continue our fight, prove I was right. I think of a plain brown envelope, protective bubble-wrap, a friend who'd write the address and mail the package from some foreign place. Anonymous.

Death notices: that's all we expect from each other these days. You started it. I slit open the envelope: my oncologist, moved west (like you), dead of a brain tumor, 49. You liked the guy well enough, but I sensed some satisfaction in the way you penned my name. You used to say I was tough, I'd outlive all my doctors, outlive everyone, even you. This summer I sent word that your 12th-grade teacher had died. She was the first part of your childhood you ever told me about. She used to gather favorite students to drink coffee and smoke and talk about life and literature at Rennebohm's after school; you had a crush on her. We came to be friends. She showed me her poetry. I wrote on the Post-It I stuck to the obit, "I thought you would want to know."

Once I told you I believed I'd caused my own Hodgkin's Disease. *I felt I'd have to die. Not die, exactly, but get so sick I couldn't take care of everything anymore. You'd have to do the housework, cook for the children, drive the carpool to nursery school.* That made you mad. You ranted, spouted statistics, cited Descartes, bullied with reason: science proves nothing about connections between the body and the mind. You mourned

the loss of my clear thinking. You were convinced I'd gone insane. Maybe the chemo had fried my brain. What died that year was never marked by formal notice. It's taking ages to decompose. But we have all moved on: you, me, neuroscience.

What I know now: you could not make me stay by the force of your pure reason, anymore than Miss H. was able to teach you the meaning of poetry.

Steve Slade -

Emily Zedley sent me a copy of the request for writing about Erickson Schaff.

I'm not sure this poem, which appears in

The current (June) issue of Poetry is

The sort of thing you had in mind, but

"Miss H" in the poem is not taken -

and the poem obviously would not exist if it were not for her.

Judith Strasser

*Producer/Interviewer
"To The Best of Our Knowledge"*

Wisconsin Public Radio

821 University Ave

Madison 53706

263-9521 / 238-7974

Gretchen Schoff met her first teaching class at West High School in Madison in January, 1954. As Miss Holstein she stepped into a room of high school juniors to be greeted by one boy with a question. "What did Miss Kluth tell you about me?" Miss Kluth had retired unexpectedly six weeks before and the class had been meeting with a substitute teacher to finish the first semester. Glancing quickly at his excuse card on the desk she replied, "Mike, I have never met Miss Kluth nor any of the students in this room before. This is a new class and we are all starting from scratch."

And start they did. In a few minutes the chairs were arranged in a circle, Gretchen sat in one of the student arm-chairs ~~desks~~ and the introduction to an Emerson essay began. Gretchen needed no warm-up. She knew how she was going to teach and she continued with that approach, I am sure, through her last class at the University.

Gretchen cared about people. Her students were people, her writers were people, her colleagues were people. I believe she was the first to use the expression "a people-person" that I can recall. I am not a people-person. As a history teacher at West High I was more interested in impersonal institutions and great human movements-- not so much, specific humans. But as the chauffeur who drove her from State and Lake corner to West High each day and stopped for coffee (10¢ a cup then) at Rennebohm Drugs each afternoon I do believe I became a bit more humanized as we discussed the days activities. She discussed novels and poetry, I talked about news items from ~~from~~ various magazines. She confessed once that the dullest activity she had faced in ^{the} high school was to sit and discuss what Congress had done the day before. Apparently she was much ahead of her time.

Her high school English classes were really Integrated Liberal Studies sessions long before these courses became popular at the University. After reading a poem on painting, her students were given sheets of wrapping paper which they taped to the blackboards and "painted with abandon" as per instructions. She played recordings of Jo Stafford singing songs of Robert Burns and contrasting vocal techniques and tonal color of opera stars Maria Callas and Renata Tebaldi. She brought art prints to the class and assigned the students to describe how the picture made them feel. An annual event came in December with students drawing names and then creating a "gift" for that person out of easily obtainable school or home supplies. No purchases were allowed. This became a great "show and tell" which the entire student body came to view.

In June of 1963 I was granted a scholarship to study Asian cultures at the University of Hawaii for one year. Gretchen also left West that year to begin work on her Ph D. The daily drives to school and the coffees at Rennebohms ended. Years later whenever we discussed her University work in I. L. S. it was still apparent that she was walking into each class with the same approach that she used so successfully at West High School. Every session was a new start.

Raymond Quant (retired history and area studies teacher)
(West High School, Madison, Wisconsin)

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Raymond Quant

A Tribute to Professor Gretchen Schoff

Thank you, Gretchen, for your ways and your lessons. Your sense of community and family have especially influenced my life and the lives of your colleagues. I remember when Bethel friends requested your insights on "community," insights that we captured on videotape. Your sense of community was much broader than I had ever imagined. I have since come to understand the importance of friends and colleagues in building "community" and use your model to make connections within and across disciplines and cultures. As we begin to explore "learning communities" for the Madison campus, I recognize that you practiced this concept throughout your life. The fact that your friends at the Meiklejohn House are coordinating this tribute is a testimony to Meiklejohn House itself, one of the first "learning communities."

I remember when your father was ill and died and later when my father died. Your sense of family was similar to my strong family relationship. We shared a few tears and sensed the gratitude we owe to family, both as parents and as children. You later shared your Book of Hours which I now cherish.

At home, at work, and at worship, you provided a model. Thanks again.

Sandra Shaw Courter
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Ideas, Imagination, Story, and Gretchen Schoff

Over a period of two decades, I had the privilege of working with Gretchen Schoff on a number of Wisconsin Humanities Committee projects. One of these, "The Frontier, the Individual, and the Community," brought together teachers, parents, and community leaders from four parts of the state to explore the values of the humanities in building community. Professor Schoff's interest in the relationship of myth, story, and history helped to shape the program. Participants came prepared to discuss pre-assigned readings which included Waiting for the Barbarians by South African writer J.M. Coetzee, selections from Wallace Stegner's Wolf Willow, and Frederick Jackson Turner's essay on The Significance of the Frontier in American History.

The program also included an art history component which stimulated Professor Schoff to develop an interest in the depiction of Native Americans as viewed by such 19th century artists as Charles Bird King, George Catlin, Karl Bodmer, and Alfred Jacob Miller. Since many of the paintings by these artists were deliberate efforts to document history, to make a record of a "vanishing race," they provide an excellent basis for inquiry on the value of art as artifact. Participants in the weekend program viewed a portion of the PBS series on The West of the Imagination as well as a slide show of selected pictures. The inclusion of Indian photographs by Edward Curtis from the early 20th century nicely illustrated questions of authenticity in the documentation of history. After completion of this public humanities series, Professor Schoff enjoyed a continued exploration of these ideas in her University classroom teaching.

People who took part in programs such as "The Frontier, the Individual, and the Community" experienced the miracle of building a strong sense of community in a relatively brief time through the excitement of sharing ideas. Professor Schoff, as a great teacher and a compassionate human being, contributed greatly to that miracle. Her respect for myth and story as important factors in shaping the human psyche had a major impact on her classroom teaching and contributed significantly to her years of work with public humanities programming throughout Wisconsin. Those of us who had the opportunity to work with her will never forget the importance of her teaching and her friendship in our lives.

Patricia C. Anderson, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Humanities Committee, the state-based program of the National Endowment for the Humanities, from 1973 through 1993.

5934 South Hill Drive
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9 June 1995

From: Emily H. Earley
2817 Sylvan Avenue
Madison, WI 53705
608/233-7289

To: Steve Slack
Integrated Liberal Studies
228 North Charter, Meiklejohn House
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Madison, WI 53706

I knew of Gretchen Schoff first when she was Miss Holstein at West High School but my children were not lucky enough to have her as their English teacher so I never met her then. I got to know her when I worked in IES as Editor of Technical Publications until my retirement in 1986, but I knew Gretchen best after she became a member of the Walrus Club.

The Walrus Club is a small - never more than a dozen members - faculty women's discussion club that was started in 1911 and that takes its name from Lewis Carroll's "'Tis time to talk of many things,' said the Walrus to the Carpenter..." Gretchen joined the Walrus Club in 1981 and was my favorite member and I think that Walrus was a favorite part of Gretchen's life. During her tenure in Walrus she gave us wonderful papers on a wide variety of topics:

Five Essays From a China Trip
Dylan Thomas
Flying
The American Indian as Seen by Charles Bird King, George Catlin, Carl Bodmer, Alfred Jacob Miller, and Edward Curtis
World War II Literature
Biography and Autobiography: Collective and Private Experiences
Norman Maclean's "A River Runs Through It"
Four Essays on Women I Have Known and Loved

All of Gretchen's Walrus papers were beautifully written and they always stimulated interesting discussions. The last four essays were especially beautiful and very moving because they were autobiographical. Gretchen shared those essays with us on April 20, 1994 and that was her last meeting with us. All of us in Walrus miss Gretchen badly and we wish we could have copies of those last four essays but we gather that they have never been found.

I am enclosing copies of two poems that Gretchen wrote for two fellow members of the Walrus Club: Janet Ela and me, Emily Earley.

For Janet Fla's Birthday

"And how do you like teaching, Miss Holstein?"
Merritt Hughes always called me "Miss" and Grace always called me "Gretchen,"
...and therein lay the difference between merit and grace, or was it between
men and women?

"I like it very much, though the students don't seem to know who they are,
(full of jargon was I). They're having trouble finding themselves."

Then came his smile like a razor, the one we all had learned meant we had
said something dumb.

"What do you mean? Don't they have names? How does one find oneself?"

Silence from--hoist on my own petard.

"I think," he went on, "that one lives one's life, finds a work and does it
well, and in the process, knows who he is."

"And laughs a good deal along the way," Grace added, clearing dishes and
picking up the shards of a perfect and simple meal she had cooked and he
had not noticed. Flowers on the table were hers too, red tulips and white iris
loved in the English fashion, year after year transplanted, cultivated, fed,
watered, then cut as a beauty for others to enjoy.

The story is yours, Janet, no moralizing on the metaphor necessary. Except,
sometimes, I'd like to bring around some of the new "liberated" women to
let you have a little talk with them. They ought to know you helped
write the definition of "liberation" before most of us had even figured out
it was a new word in the lexicon.

Gretchen Seipp
May, 1985

Walrus Meeting

On the occasion of Emily's paper, January 1991

Closed doors of the mind,
A sleeve drawn decently down over a scar,
Lowered lids,
Words that skitter sidewise--
The brotherhood of women,
Most secret of all societies.

Safe in the lockboxes of pride,
The scrapbooks of privacy,
Are gardens abandoned,
Pearl and white rose weddings
Round babies in lace,
Dance programs and diplomas,
And images of men,
Passionate, cold, caught by the lens
In their watchchains, mustaches,
And self-confidence.

When minutes are read, years hence,
No trace will remain of the sense of the meeting.
How could stylus record the sound
Of the key in the mind's door,
What we saw when the sleeve fell back,
Or the momentary meeting of honest eyes?
The secret code broke open, settled in silence,
And became a poem.

Justin Saff

Twila Rude
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Re Prof. Gretchen Schoff

Dear Steve,

You asked us to be specific, so what I have to say
may not be appropriate for your purpose. If you can't
use them I shall understand; nonetheless, these lines
reflect the Gretchen that I knew.

She listened when you spoke to her
Made what you had to say somehow worthwhile.

She had a way of getting to the heart of things without
meandering,
In discourse and in dissertation,
An intellect that stretched the minds of those she touched.

She had an eye for beauty
In poetry and prose,
In cranes that stepped and soared,
In carpets from the East..

And with it all good Scandinavian sense
That laughed and let you know
She did not see herself the center of the universe.

I never heard her say an unkind word.

Her death diminished all of us, and yet
She left a legacy of special sons.
How great a gift to leave a troubled world.

Thank you for including me in your tribute.

A friend of the Schoffs,

Twila Rude

Twila Rude

Passings

Steve Slack
November 9th, 1995

I first met Gretchen Holstein Schoff in Speaking for Nature. She seemed tolerably eccentric, very knowledgeable yet humble. She had an aura of the dearest Irish peasant mother wrapped in the dark frocks of the scholar and priest. The long graying brownish-red hair tied back in a pony tail and dangling earrings said her old-fashioned and religious air was aware of liberal thought. She didn't walk so much as glide -- a gliding frock -- on hushed shoes, and with the occasional sway of a choir member. For a woman named Holstein in the Dairy State, and subjected to the creative mischief of her students in High School and college, she achieved unassailable physical grace. Her eyes and face commanded all the attention. She was your mother. You hung on the nuances of her brow, the squint of the eye, the turn of the corner of her mouth as she chewed on your writing. You knew she knew you -- saw right through. What was she seeing just now? What was she *not* saying, saving for later? Like all honest people, she looked right into your eyes. She would ask you to account for something, then sit back and listen with the expression of an eagle: fierce, noble, and utterly alert to the point of piercing -- all the more so given her sharp nose and habit of crooking one eyebrow. She knew just how much you could take, and gave you that. While always kind, she could intimidate you by asking fair questions that revealed your inconsistency or self-importance. You wanted to please her more than anyone because you knew she could help you: she had seen a case like you before.

Sometimes her eyes and smile would beam at you like the sun coming out from clouds in the afternoon -- they warmed you and transformed an otherwise uncertain atmosphere. This was especially true after almost cold silences as she read to herself in your presence for awkwardly long periods. Hers were the eyes of all deeply spiritual people I have met; eyes of joy that only those humble enough to surrender to something greater than themselves can have; eyes disciplined by religious concentration on the eternal so they were not easily distracted. Eyes that had seen a great secret and embraced its mystery.

Her voice was measured and calm -- I cannot recall a time when I heard her speak in haste despite the fact that she was frightfully busy and involved. Nor did I ever hear her say a thoughtless word. The only vocal quirk was an abruptness in her telephone voice when you called her at home as she requested. I always wondered if I had interrupted a dinner that was burning or her poetic flow. But she was just intensely private. I learned to not take it personally when new T.A.s approached me with disconcerted looks and asked if Gretchen was upset with them. "Oh, did you call her at home?" I'd ask. "Yes, how did you know?"

She was one of the busiest and hardest workers I knew: her ILS mailbox filled to overflowing twice a day, and it was only one of three boxes on campus. Everyone wanted a piece of her. But she was never hectic, never complained. She dealt with reams by using that eagle eye to seize the essence, and then with her expansive view of things, she ignored the lesser matters and crafted something cogent about taking the next step. Though I never had the nerve to stop in, I am told that she had a permanent table at Perkins where she escaped campus and home, and worked until the wee hours on all that mail and her own writing.

Yet there was no sign of fragmentation, ambition or raw striving; no need to prove anything. She was already there, seamless, like the art she admired:

Only where love and need are one,
And the work is play for mortal stakes,
Is the deed ever truly done
for Heaven and the future's sakes.

What she did was out of love and duty. She was uncomfortable with those who made excuses or demanded recognition, but who were unwilling to earn it like everyone else. She saw right through hypocrites who bent truth to fit self-serving agendas. But she still helped them to see how much we are all mostly victims of ourselves, and hence have the power to take the next step. Gretchen earned respect by her work, trusted the judgment of colleagues upon it, and expected others to do the same. One of the hardest and truest things I learned from Gretchen was that a work must stand on its own. Truth is not a popularity contest.

She found a great deal of truth in literature, especially that of nature writers, yet she was not outdoorsy. I doubt she enjoyed long walks. She preferred her sturdy state-trooper cars acquired at auctions when crossing campus. No -- books and writing and people were her terrain, and she was content to let her poetic imagination scale the peaks with Muir or saunter with Thoreau. On solo get-aways she went to London literary haunts, or checked in for a week at the Oshkosh Experimental Air Show to witness the perfection of the P-51.

And so my years with Gretchen consisted of brief vignettes -- a weekly T.A. meeting when I was new, the walk across the street to and from lectures, chance encounters in the hall, a handful of longer meetings for lunch, advising, and my defense, and the exchange of written comments. In those brief passings, she somehow accomplished it all. As she said often of literature, "More's a pity."

My own search for truth had also converged with literature. I never really knew, but I suspect that she took me under her wing because of the stories I gave her, and everything we did since built upon the recognition that we were both storytellers. One of my first serious attempts was to understand why I had left a group of wildlife department den hunters and wandered off into the woods where a coyote ran up to me, sat down, and died. I wrote 16 drafts in trying to interpret this surreal event. But I needed a complimentary shock to my writing to make sense of this coyote experience. It was Gretchen who taught me what it meant to match form and subject in writing. Until then, this had been a vague and flowery concept of little consequence to me, a cliché phrase used unconvincingly by lesser teachers. When we analyzed John Muir's essay, *A Near View of the Sierra*, I soon learned that my rugged hero had delivered a deeper message between the lines that I had missed. Gretchen noted how it was a mountain story, so the form and meaning went up and down! How obvious now, and how invisible then! From then on, I was able to "crack" most any writing. I got direction for my love of language, and struggled in finding the proper form for each subject -- a truly hellish and sometimes exhilarating process. I began to liken the discovery of the proper form for a "nature" story as an actual part of the backpacking or canoe trip

itself. The trip wasn't over until I glimpsed the underlying form in writing. Then that great feeling of enlightenment comes: that's why it felt like that! Writing was not merely description, but *discovery*: to find the proper metaphor that revealed the inner half of the journey and corresponded honestly to the outer experience. It was all there in the words. She assigned deceptively simple essays on defining your home and world view, and I applied her lesson on form by passing her own words back in my essay, *A Whorled View of Home*. It was a romp that supported the notion that the physical and experiential worlds are spiraling, and hence are part familiar, part mysterious. I know she appreciated the pun with a sly grin in passing my paper back.

Her approval encouraged me to tune these stories after our class was over, and I gave them to her months later. One day I stopped by to see what Gretchen had thought of my efforts, and what she passed on to me will never be forgotten. I felt a bit awkward imposing on her time for a bit of advice and, hopefully, a word of praise. I knocked at her open door in Science Hall and she seemed not to notice, sternly writing away for unbearable minutes. I knocked again, and she did not react -- now I knew I was intruding. So I stood there, naked. Her thought done, she turned to me and I expected to see that severe face she could make when she was all business and you were chatty, but instead I saw the peasant-mother's warmth and smile. With twinkling eyes, she said "Come in!" I hesitated and said "I could come back another time... Have you even had a chance to read them yet?" She leaned back, opened her arms to her desk overloaded with stacks of committee reports and thesis drafts and articles and unopened mail and said, "Actually, they're the first things I read amidst all this blaahhh." That said it all, so I entered and she adjusted chairs so we were very close. I can't recall all that was said, but she assured me that I wrote well and should submit these stories. She seemed more interested in *me* and my pursuits, but I wanted more *writing* feedback. Gretchen leaned on her knees toward me, and with a genuine parental concern, asked gravely "What are your plans?" There was nowhere to wiggle out of the fact I had none. I said that I had been supported by a P.A. that had run out after two years of grad school, and I was wondering if she or anyone else had a T.A. spot? She said no, that she reserved those for people she advised until they finished, and no one would be leaving soon. "What will you do?" I told her that I would probably have to drop out awhile and earn some money, for I just couldn't bear the thought of taking out more student loans when already so in debt. Without hesitation, and still staring into my now discouraged face, she said, "I would be willing to pay your way." I blushed, shifted in my seat, embarrassed that I had cried poor so loudly that I was a charity case. I was stunned, speechless. Sensing my discomfort, she said "I have enough money and am willing to do it." I struggled to believe that in the 1980s in America and at a Big 10 university I was hearing a professor I had had for one course offer to give me thousands of dollars just so I would continue school and reach my potential, which was apparently clear to her and a mystery to me! "No, no...I couldn't. I'll be alright." I thought to ask if she meant to loan me the money -- anything to make conversation and come to my senses -- but the way she was looking I knew it was a gift. Well, I had gotten more praise and feedback than I bargained for! As I was to observe for years, Gretchen acted out of this most profound source of intuition, conviction, and compassion beneath the veneer of rationality. That spiritual and poetic fire lurked behind most of her well-disguised "practical" advice and expressions. She was playing with you, hoping you'd catch on to her

understated, multi-level messages, and connect with your own fire. She had complete faith, and knew herself. Despite the subject, she knew it always came back to the eternal question: how will you come to know yourself in doing this? I think this was the key to her ease and effectiveness, her mastery.

Well, I never took her offer, and I stayed in school somehow. But I did take her offer of trust in me. How did she know that this was *just* what I needed most then to get unstuck and take the next step -- to know that selfless people like her existed, and thereby regain my faith in humanity so I could pursue ideals? Here was someone like me, who really believed and tried to live by the words and ideals of Thoreau and Muir. She understood the costs, and still acted compassionately to stem the tide of masses living lives of quiet desperation. She cut through the blaahhh. It made life worth living somehow to know that everyone did not act mechanically out of economic necessity and become predictable bureaucrats. She was the real deal. If the faith moved her, she went and hung on. Her faith in me made me respect my potential enough to unfold it rather than squander it. Her offer was nothing like a naive, communal sharing of wealth, or the luxury of a rich dame: Gretchen had three college-aged sons, medical school tuition, and plenty of bills to pay. I can't ever imagine myself doing the same for even my best student, but maybe I have more to learn from her yet.

It was almost a year later when I saw her again in the deserted basement of Science Hall. We nodded polite grins and I passed in a hurry, and I felt awkward as usual at how we can share so much with each other yet must pretend to be mere acquaintances these days. As she glided to a halt, and recalled my name, her frock did the choir-sway: "Steve?" I returned to her, and said hello. "Are you employed next semester?" "No." "Would you like to be my T.A.?" I was saved, and years of searching ended with the gift of this golden chance. And with that she plucked me from the student ranks and set me before a class: I was now the teacher. She never told me much about teaching, and yet showed me everything, and I ran wild with it to the neglect of my own research. Rather, I was researching the value of educating people and the likelihood this would work in time in a burning world. Was this my calling? I taught Literary Interpretation of Technology and Critical Thinking & Expression each three times. My notes from her previous lectures revealed her secret for making old material ever-new, and I learned the trick of prioritizing and emphasis in speaking. We evolved as master and apprentice. She allowed me to follow her to IES and teach Humanistic Perspectives on the Environment. She vouched for me so I could teach for others in Botany and IES. Once I called a professor for a job and he asked me who I'd worked for. I mentioned Gretchen's name and he exclaimed: I got the job from a stranger within two minutes on the phone because of her reputation. When she was gone, I took over lecturing her Literary Interpretation of Technology -- as frightening as that first T.A. spot. If I had not spent those years teaching, I cannot conceive of where I would be today. The one thing that I know I've done right was to invest in my students, and I am constantly rewarded by encounters with them. And all this from a chance passing in the hall.

I happened to bump into Gretchen on my one visit to campus at the lowest point of my graduate life, and she made time to console me. She confessed in an apologetic tone that she had never known how to help me. This surprised me, for here was the master of helping. "You've been the most help to me of anyone on this campus!" I said. "Just knowing you exist...that a generalist can exist in this specialized world has given me all the hope in the

world." She hadn't figured on that, and I had consoled her. And we both knew there was nothing anyone could do except for me.

In a month or two, I had my 400-plus page thesis done, and I defended it. She advised that I bring goodies and make coffee. Mom. She was silent and alert throughout the defense because others were experts at my subject of national parks, and I suspect she was very tense for me beneath it all. I passed. She added the only correction: I had given a new first name to one of the key people half-way through. I may be wrong, but I got the feeling that she was the only one who actually read that monster, or skimmed it the least. We had a good laugh, and when everyone left, she came up beaming, with tears welling in her eyes, and gave me a huge hug. She tweaked my cheeks and said "I knew you could do it! I'm so proud of you!" Oh, was I glad that she got to see me go through the finish line after investing so much in me. But I had grown so war-weary from isolated months of battling computers and the thesis that I was impervious to joy or sorrow. I said I felt like a P.O.W. and had achieved a kind of fierce patience that nothing could disturb. Oddly, the more flatly I spoke about how I would complete the next steps of the prelims and the dissertation, the more her smile widened. Her eyes passed back and forth in mine, searching to see where I'd changed, or if I had any clue that I had found the self-discipline I needed. She knew that I could do anything after this. I managed a smile in return.

This led to the one day where I knew Gretchen had allowed me into her private world that she so fiercely protected. She was now Chair of my Ph.D. committee, and we had to coordinate the process between five professors. So we rolled up our sleeves, and I made calls at her desk while Gretchen typed a letter next to me at her computer table. The phone rang, and again. She kept her head in place and merely raised her eyes slightly off her sentence, paused. I read her unspoken message. I picked up *her* phone -- which could have been one of any number of dignitaries -- and in that moment, the apprentice became her colleague. She made revisions in the letter based on the information I gathered on the phone. We were a seamless team, of one mind and purpose, without need of words. Amazingly, I reached all five professors and each had agreed with the format and terms we proposed. She remarked how rare it was to organize all these steps so that the group came with things in hand and thereby eliminated the need for other meetings and delays. It all came off without a hitch. But beneath it -- unspoken between us -- was an understanding of something greater having transpired.

After immersing myself in books and writing my prelims for two weeks, I was passing by ILS one day. Chancing that Gretchen was there, I stopped in and saw her for the last time. Everyone had read my prelims and I was eager to hear the results. I told her that I learned more in those two weeks than all of grad school because I finally got a chance to *think* and put years of my best insights from teaching and course work and life together into a new framework. I told her that it was the most fun I'd had in years. She said, with that big grin and nod, "It showed." I went on and on about my head full of ideas and new insights, and she nodded and nodded. After awhile she rose to leave. I followed.

We walked out of ILS together that Spring, and she was off to meet her husband for lunch and I to the computer lab, and neither knew that it was goodbye. Through all the troubles and growth and laughter we shared, she taught me by her example how to keep my eye on the prize when all about me are petty and evil, to never speak ill of others who

deserve it, to look within and find a way to act and reach out to make things better instead of merely criticize, that work speaks louder than words, and to smile amidst the blaahhh. When she realized at our first meeting that I was a generalist and doomed to be ground up by the system, she shared her secret with me: "If you're going to be a generalist, you're going to have to learn to live in the cracks." She taught me most importantly that one could function in the megamachine and still be fully human, and for that, I owe her thanks for giving me that most precious gift, hope.

It is the oddest feeling that she should be dead, for the part of her she shared with me is still alive and going strong: the quest for truth, rigor in writing, linking ideas and reality, teaching, how to read others and help them, and the endless passing on of the flame. When I think of Gretchen, this is what comes to mind, this is what we so painstakingly cultivated -- insights and words that *transcended* death and time. She is literally alive to me whenever words ring true and elegant and sincere; I hear her voice when reading the works we taught or when I borrow her phrases. I can only imagine and empathize with those who knew her more as a physical presence on a daily basis, for they would surely feel a different sort of loss. After the days of grief for her suffering and fall, I was overcome by a profound sense of duty. All I could do was try to pass on that thing she had achieved -- the process and pitfalls of attaining self-knowledge -- to others. For whatever reason, she had picked me, and there was no other way to repay the privilege of her mentoring. The trick is that one cannot imitate Gretchen or any mentor to do it. She even taught me that. Her great lesson is that your life is a work of art, and you must stand on your own in the end.

Professor urges students to find themselves in writing.

BY GEORGE VUKELICH

Gretchen Schoff is a professor at UW-Madison, where she teaches courses in the Institute for Environmental Studies, Integrated Liberal Studies and the College of Engineering. Called by one colleague "a Renaissance woman," Schoff is a poet and essayist, and she wrote the text for the acclaimed *Reflections: The Story of Cranes*, published in 1991 by the International Crane Foundation. She is particularly proud of her university course "Humanistic Perspectives on the Environment," which she defines as a study of the American love affair with nature. Her students are required to read the writings of great American



BRENT NICASTRO

Schoff wants students to 'discover a sense of their place in the world.'

naturalists and also to keep their own journals. She does the same, observing that she would not ask students to do something their teacher is not doing. Schoff will be the keynote speaker for a three-day conference on "Human Values and the Environment," Oct. 1-3 at the Wisconsin Center on campus.

"For a long time I've written something almost every day because it's a way of calling up territory that otherwise goes by without being noticed.

"What I do in the classroom is in part to try to put students in touch with that same thing in themselves. What goes on in the classroom is frequently looked upon by students as having nothing to do with their own lives, and that's a great pity. There has to be something that puts them in touch with themselves. I think that's the important part of education.

"Nature writing is a good way to do that because nature writers tend to place themselves in settings that put them in touch with, I suppose you could



say, the spiritual in themselves—with things larger than themselves.

"The question before us is still Huxley's old great question: *Where have we been and where are we going?* That's the great question of everybody's life. Huxley called it 'the question of questions.'

"That's always in the back of my mind when I teach. Everything that the university so carefully divides into 'disciplines' really has to be held within this much larger framework of that question of questions: Where did we come from, and what is the goal that we're tending toward?

"Then I have this other side of me that asks what I hope to do for the kids. And that's to help them discover a sense of themselves and a sense of their

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LISTENING IN

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place in the world. For Aldo Leopold, that place was out at 'the shack.' For Wendell Berry, it was at his farm in Kentucky. For Annie Dillard—especially when she was as young as my students are now—it was just going off somewhere for a couple of years and being *quiet*. Just listening to herself, for a change.

"In my teaching, I use a piece of Annie Dillard's writing. I use Thoreau's 'Walking,' John McPhee's *Encounters with the Archdruid*, Norman MacLean's *A River Runs Through It*, Willa Cather's *My Antonia*, John Muir's *Story of My Boyhood and Youth*, Aldo Leopold's *A*

Sand County Almanac. A little portion of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. A little Edward Abbey. I've used Sigurd Olson's *Listening Point* at times. The problem is, we only have 16 weeks, and students complain that they have an awful lot to read.

"I couple the readings with a running commentary on them—what I call a 'planting posts and stringing wire' history of the environmental movement. For example, John Muir's nature writings are set inside the context of the great battle for wilderness, when he and Gifford Pinchot fought over Hetch Hetchy.

"Much of what goes on in education is artificial, students simply throwing the teacher's words back. This course is not artificial." ■

Two Tramps in Mud Time

Out of the mud two strangers came
And caught me splitting wood in the yard.
And one of them put me off my aim
By hailing cheerily "hit them hard!"
I knew pretty well why he dropped behind
And let the other go on a way.
I knew pretty well what he had in mind:
He wanted to take my job for pay.

Good blocks of beech it was I split,
As large around as the chopping block;
And every piece I squarely hit
Fell splinterless as a cloven rock.
The blows that a life of self-control
Spares to strike for the common good
That day, giving a loose to my soul,
I spent on the unimportant wood.

The sun was warm but the wind was chill.
You know how it is with an April day
When the sun is out and the wind is still,
You're one month on in the middle of May.
But if you so much as dare to speak,
A cloud comes over the sunlit arch,
A wind comes off a frozen peak,
And you're two months back in the middle of March.

A bluebird comes tenderly up to alight
And fronts the wind to unruffle a plume
His song so pitched as not to excite
A single flower as yet to bloom.
It is snowing a flake: and he half knew
Winter was only playing possum.
Except in color he isn't blue,
But he wouldn't advise a thing to blossom.

The water for which we may have to look
In summer time with a witching-wand,
In every wheelrut's now a brook,
In every print of a hoof a pond.
Be glad of water, but don't forget
The lurking frost in the earth beneath
That will steal forth after the sun is set
And show on the water its crystal teeth.

The time when I most loved my task
These two must make me love it more
By coming with what they came to ask.
You'd think I never had felt before
The weight of an ax-head poised aloft,
The grip on earth of outspread feet,
The life of muscles rocking soft
And smooth and moist in the vernal heat.

Out of the woods two hulking tramps
(From sleeping God knows where last night,
But not long since in the lumber camps).
They thought all chopping was theirs by right.
Men of the woods and lumberjacks,
They judged me by their appropriate tool.
Except as a fellow handled an ax,
The had no way of knowing a fool.

Nothing on either side was said.
The knew they had but to stay their stay
And all their logic would fill my head:
As that I had no right to play
With what was another man's work for gain.
My right might be love but theirs was need.
And where the two exist in twain
Theirs was the better right -- agreed.

But yield who will to their separation,
My object in living is to unite
My avocation and my vocation
As my two eyes make one in sight.
Only where love and need are one,
And the work is play for mortal stakes,
Is the deed ever really done
For Heaven and the future's sakes.

-- Robert Frost

MILWAUKEE JOURNAL MAGAZINE

September 6, 1987

A DOZEN OF THE BEST
-GRETCHEN SCHOFF-



Eleanor Miller,
University of
Wisconsin-Milwaukee

PROFS AS TEACHERS

A DOZEN TOP PROF

BY DICK JONES

O

NE of the joys of college teaching is getting a fresh start every semester — especially in fall. “No matter how weary we all get by the end of a semester,” says one professor, “there’s a rush at the beginning of a new semester. You get a new crack at it. People get excited. There’s a constant revitalizing going on, even though it can be a frustrating process.”

And who are the people who rise above the frustration and make learning especially exciting? Who are the exceptional teachers on Wisconsin campuses?

Last spring we set out in search of teachers who believe that the joy in knowing something comes largely in sharing it with others. We sought professors who inspire students and, in one short semester, create a lasting influence.

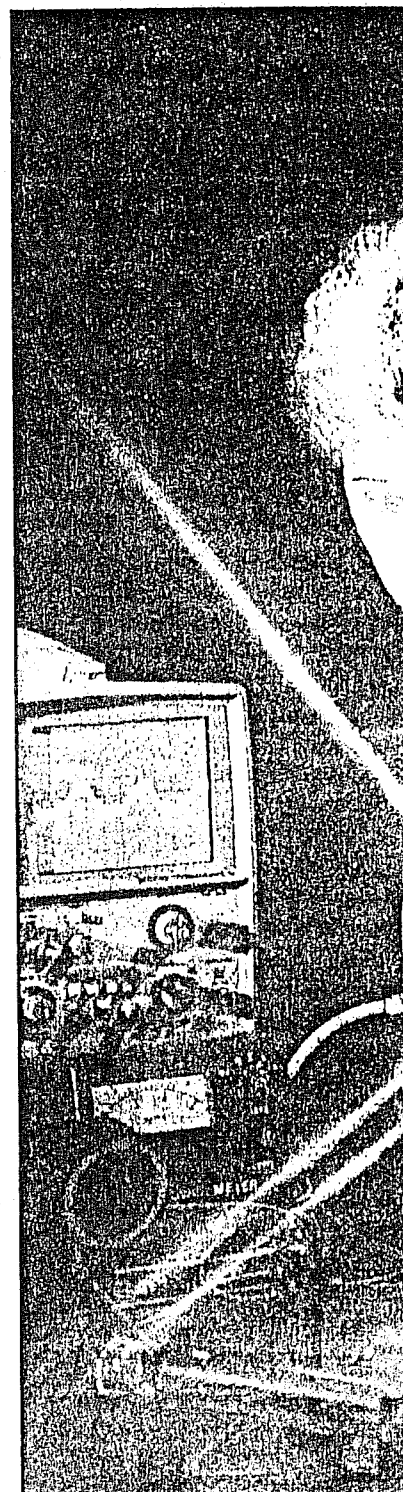
Academia was all too eager to produce long lists of professors who received distinguished teaching awards. We reviewed them, but we didn’t stop there. We called chancellors, deans of academic affairs, deans of students and deans of various departments.

Next, we talked to professors, those who serve on committees involved in running the campuses and those devoted exclusively to teaching — some teaching future teachers. We talked to teaching assistants. And perhaps most important, we talked to students. We called leaders of student government, editors of student newspapers, honor students.

Admittedly, our selection was somewhat arbitrary. We couldn’t talk to everyone and we couldn’t make it to every campus. We wanted a list representative of Wisconsin’s public and private colleges and universities. We also wanted a mix of disciplines.

Once we agreed on a dozen professors, we tried to attend one class taught by each of them. In interviews, we asked them why they teach and what makes a good teacher. We also asked them about a report the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching issued nearly a year ago.

The Carnegie report all but indicted higher education for failing its chief mission: education. The report said colleges and universities had become super trade schools with students more concerned about getting a job than an education. Professors were criticized for concentrating more on conducting their research than on teaching students.





James Benton teaches sociology at St. Norbert College, De Pere.

most Americans have a Tarzan kind of attitude."

Gretchen Schoff's education

GROWING up in Neillsville in central Wisconsin, Gretchen Schoff was surrounded by teachers: Her mother, uncles and aunts all taught school. So young Gretchen's education never ceased, even at home.

For her, child's play consisted of riddles and word games.

At an early age, she taught piano and, with the money earned, paid her way through state teachers college in Stevens Point, getting degrees in English and chemistry. Then she taught high school. Now, at 55, she teaches at the UW—Madison.

Schoff is a professor of engineering, integrated liberal studies and environmental studies.

She says a good teacher, besides having a command of her subject, is someone who gets excited about learning, inspires students and cares about them.

"Anybody who's got a Ph.D. can wow a freshman," Schoff says. "You can jam it down their throats, but I don't think much is gained by that if you're insensitive to the best way to do it. You help students by showing them what to do next, and what to do next, and what to do next, until you push them off the branch and make them do it themselves."

If teaching suffers at UW-Madison and other large campuses, the blame lies chiefly with an educational system that has allowed itself to get so big, Schoff says.

"Many of the best things that I think are involved in teaching have disappeared by virtue of the scale," she says. "Teachers are working inside a system that they can't fight. If you've got a lecture with 400 kids, you don't get to know them very well."

However, she says that students can still get a good education at UW-Madison if they learn from others who the good teachers are. Then, as sophomores, begin taking courses these professors teach at the junior and senior level,

where the classes have fewer students.

Schoff laments the lack of rewards for good teaching. Each year, about a dozen distinguished-teaching awards are presented at the UW—Madison. In 1979, Schoff was so honored.

"I can honestly say that that award means more to me than anything I've ever done at this university," she says, "but when you set that against the other awards for research, it's a drop in the bucket."

"The great teachers here are in the main great teachers in spite of [the few rewards]," she says.

"They can't help themselves. They're born teachers."

James Robb's tears

TEACHING philosophy sometimes moves James Robb to tears. His voice cracks with emotion when he reads from works such as Antoine de Saint-Exupery's *Wind, Sand and Stars*.

"I'm always deeply moved by what I read, what I see and hear," Robb says. "There are few things I can't read without having a few tears or a choke in my voice. But I think they're important to share. Students respond to that."

Robb, who is 69, has been teaching at Marquette since 1956, and his love of philosophy is exceeded only by a love for students.

Between classes Robb often sits on a bench talking with students — like Socrates, a colleague says.

His students never flunk. "I haven't failed a student in many years," he says. Instead, he will tutor the failing student until he or she earns at least a passing grade by semester's end.

"I consider that I've failed when a student fails, and I don't want to fail. I don't give them a passing grade. They earn it."

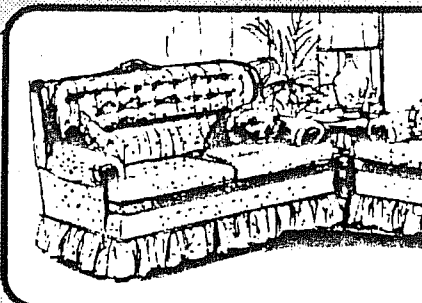
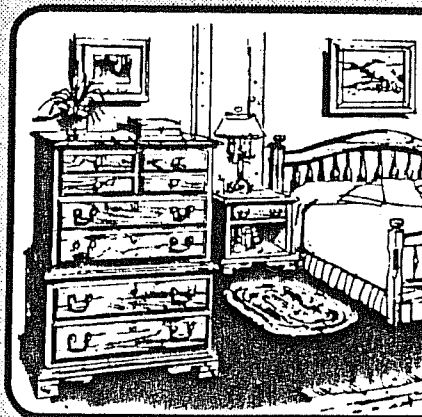
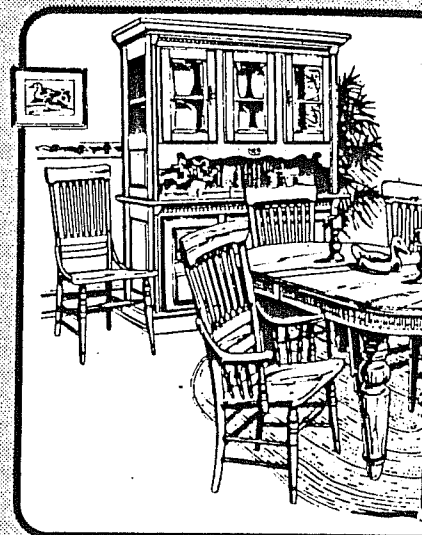
Perhaps because he's so happy in his career, Robb has students write papers explaining how the careers they plan will make them happy. For some, it reinforces their decision. For others, it changes their lives.

Robb walks with a cane, the result of a World War II knee injury that left

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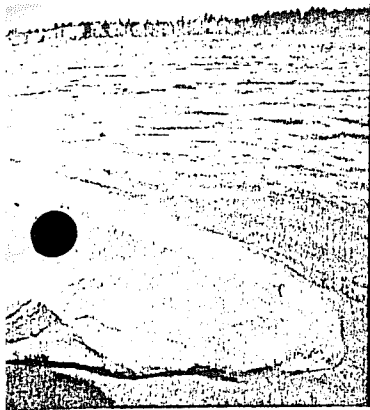


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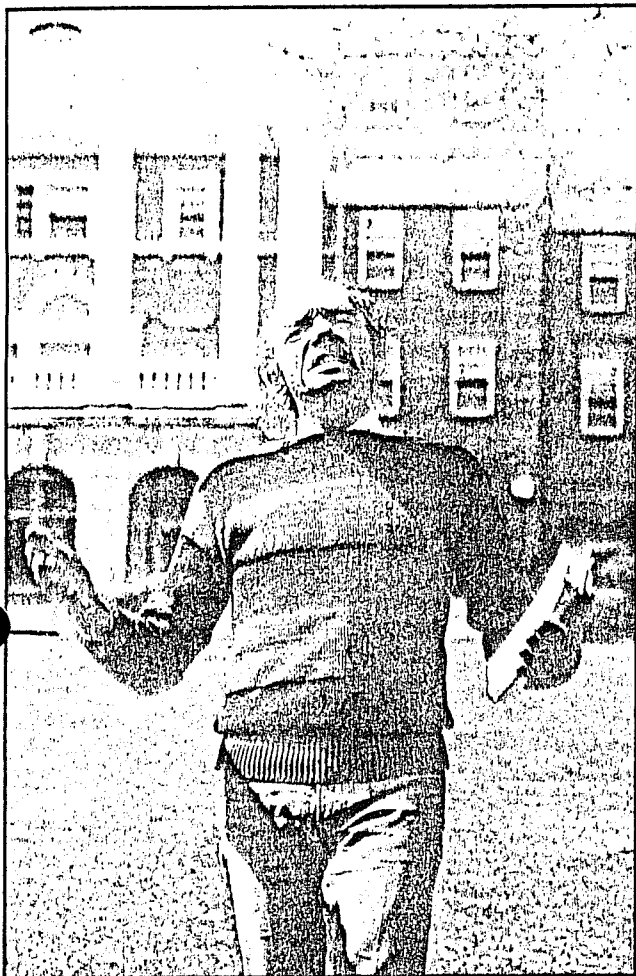
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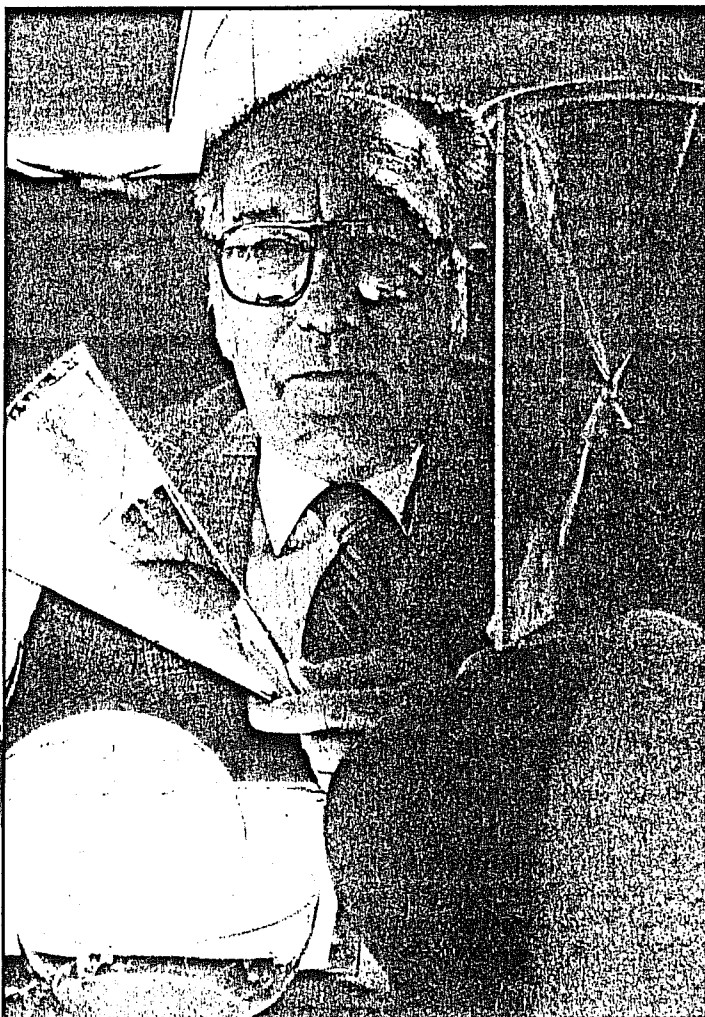
Richard Wilke,
UW—Stevens Point



James Robb, Marquette University



Harold Scheub, UW—Madison



Marshall Wick, UW—Eau Claire



Gretchen Schoff, UW—Madison

Lawrence University physicist John Brandenberger: Students (like Mary Rodgers) are really junior researchers.