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Heartfelt Thanks from a Former Cabbage Head and Warm Body - "Here's To Ya, Mr. Brevards!"

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Winthrop University

Heartfelt Thanks from a Former Cabbage Head and Warm Body—“Here’s To Ya, Mr. Brevard!”

I read the obituaries every morning in the *Charlotte Observer*. As that rarest of all birds, a native Charlottean, I often find names of people I know: distant relatives, friends of my parents, former neighbors, and increasingly as I grow older, high school classmates. Just before Christmas, I saw the obituary of my tenth grade biology teacher, Mr. Leo D. Brevard.

Seeing his name and his picture brought back a flood of memories: a short, stocky man; a former drill sergeant who ran his class like a raw, wayward platoon; his sandals with white socks; the wicked glint in his eyes as he called on his terrified young biology students, commanding us to hold up our Annelida by the proboscis.

Mr. Brevard may have been the most demanding and hardest teacher I ever had at any level. He filled us with fear, he intimidated us, he belittled us, he drove us. This does not sound like good

teaching, but Mr. Leo D. Brevard was also one of the best teachers I ever had.

We talked about him behind his back, of course, as cowed prisoners would do when the warden was away. In my insouciant 15-year-old way, I developed a perfect imitation of him, aping his country drawl and his eccentric mannerisms. Pretending to hold up a red thermos cup of coffee and a sugar cookie, I would say, “Here’s to ya! I hope you have a fine year in biology.” [Dripping with sarcasm.] “You’re nothing but a bunch of eight-ball idiots! You’re nothing but a bunch of cabbage heads! You’re nothing but a bunch of warm bodies! There’s not a student amongst ya!” My good friends and fellow sufferers Jon Shoebottom, Ed Purdue, and Robert Sadler would egg me on and make me do it every day at lunch as we ate our Nutty Buddies. (We called them “Insane Cohorts”—yes, we were the nerd patrol.)

For the last day of class, they talked me into impersonating Mr. Brevard in front of him and the whole class. Fool that I was (and am), I did it, complete with white socks and sandals and all of his catchphrases.

Mr. Brevard laughed. Whew!

We had to have our biology textbook in class every day, and it had to sit precisely on the left front corner of our lab tables—but we could never open it in class. We had weekly tests on Latin roots and syllables, since they are so fundamental to the nomenclature of biology. (I learned a great deal in that class, but those darn Latin roots and syllables were the most valuable and long-lasting.) We did genetics experiments on *Drosophila*, we dissected earthworms and frogs, we examined planaria under the microscope and made drawings of cell contents. We had to write a ten-page typed research paper. My title was “The Discovery of Diastase and

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the Development of Biochemistry." I was prouder of that "B" than many better grades I made in other classes. My final science project was "The Effect of Thought on Plant Growth." (Mr. Brevard talked to his plants as he watered them—I was making fun of him even in my science project!)

A few years later, in college, I was transferring and trying to get my general education courses completed. I had taken two science courses, which the university required, but I needed a life science. I asked if I could challenge the course by a test. The chair of biology asked me what my background was, and when I told him I had taken biology in the tenth grade, he laughed, heartily and contemptuously. "Nobody passes that test, and you certainly won't be the first!"

I passed that test. I got credit for college biology. Thank you, Mr. Brevard!

I saw him a few years later and was able to tell him about that test, and most importantly, to thank him in person. Now that he is gone, I am very glad I was able to do that. I have had so many teachers I would like to

thank for what they taught me, but for most, I will never get the chance.

I realize now that I learned much more from Mr. Brevard than enough biology to test out of a college course. I learned reading and study skills. I learned enough Latin to help me with a number of subjects and with my own teaching of literature and language. I learned that I can face tough tasks, a tough teacher, a tough course, and succeed. (My PhD dissertation and my stern dissertation director, Howard "C minus" Horsford did not seem as intimidating after Mr. Brevard.) I learned that great teachers can come in a variety of approaches and styles. I learned that the greatness of a teacher sometimes cannot be gauged while the student is engaged in the course. Sometimes it takes years to figure that out.

From Mr. Brevard's obituary, I learned that he had begun buying mountain land during the 1960s, preserving the land and becoming a leader in innovative forestry practices, with many thousands of acres by the time of his death. I like to imagine him walking through his forest preserve, talking to the oaks and pines the same way he talked to his plants

in the classroom as he watered them: "Drink Up, little green and yellow buddies!"

I realize now that he was nurturing more than those little green and yellow buddies; he was watering and nurturing his little cabbage heads.

So, today, 45 years later, I lift my imaginary red thermos cup and say, "Here's to ya, Mr. Leo D. Brevard! I thank you for that fine year of biology!"

And for much, much more.

First Annual Winthrop Conference on Teaching and Learning

Save this date: Friday, February 21, 2014, 2:00 pm-6:00 pm, for our inaugural conference on teaching and learning. Eventually, we want to expand this to a multi-day conference, as well as to include other area institutions. But this first one will be ours alone. The deadline for proposals just passed, and we will have a rich and interesting program, thanks to the talents and skills of the Winthrop community. You can register now at the TLC website:

<http://www2.winthrop.edu/ogin/tlc/default.asp>

XXITE 2.0 ----- The Virtual Gathering Place for WU (The Reboot!)

Jo Koster and I invite you to join XXITE (Twenty-first Century Teaching Excellence)—or if you have already joined, to check it out again as it grows and develops. Maybe you have not been there in a long time—if not, you will see many changes in look and content. For example, XXITE now has groups dedicated to HMXP and CRTW, with

those of us who teach those courses sharing ideas and materials. Talk to Jo about setting up your own interest group. Jo is particularly interested in recruiting a few people to blog regularly about their teaching.

Jo set up this interactive site to give Winthrop faculty a virtual gathering space to share ideas about teaching and

technology. You'll find blogs and discussion forums on various topics—and we urge you to add your own ideas. Visit again at <http://wuxxite.ning.com/> Or email Jo Koster for an invitation to join: kosterj@winthrop.edu The TLC website also has links to navigate your way there or to join: <http://www2.winthrop.edu/tlc/>

A New Service From the TLC: Teaching Consultation

The Teaching and Learning Center is offering a new service: teaching consultation. At the instructor's request, I (or another agreed-upon person) will visit your class to observe and consult with you afterwards about your successes and challenges. This consultation has nothing to do with the tenure and

promotion process, and no reports will be made to department chairs or deans (unless you so request). The invitation to the consultant can only come from the instructor, not from a dean or chair or any other person. All conversations will be private and confidential. If you don't want me to visit your class and observe your teaching, we could

just meet and talk about your teaching. If I am not available to visit your class because of my schedule, I will find a qualified person to do the consulting. So please let me know if you would like to invite me into your class or for a consultation. Call or email me at (803) 323-3679 or birdj@winthrop.edu.

Go2Knowledge—Learning On Demand!

Go2Knowledge is a website that offers a variety of video presentations on faculty and staff professional development. You will find presentations by nationally-known experts in seven categories: At-Risk Populations, Campus Safety, Organizational Development, Student Success, Teaching and Learning, Technology,

and Open Educational Resources. Within each category, you will find a number of excellent and informative videos. The Office of Academic Affairs has provided us a one-year subscription to this service.

People often tell the TLC that they would like to go to sessions, but they don't have the time or they can't

at the times sessions are offered. With Go2Knowledge, you can attend sessions on demand, anywhere, 24/7. The TLC will also have frequent Go2Knowledge Groups, where we meet to discuss a presentation. Log in here: <http://www.go2knowledge.org/winthrop> See you there!

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BLOG POSTS

- NEW POSTS ON THE RENOVATIONS**
Posted by [Mark Y. Herring](#) on June 22, 2012 at 2:05pm
- CORE VALUES**
Posted by [Mark Y. Herring](#) on June 5, 2012 at 9:41am
- PLAYING TO TYPE**
Posted by [Blaiz C. Herring](#) on May 25, 2012 at 10:22am
- TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING IN THE CLASSROOM**
Posted by [Amanda Hiler](#) on March 15, 2012 at 12:11pm — 1 Comment
- GONE WITH THE WIND...**
Posted by [Jo Koster](#) on March 6, 2012 at 10:33am — 2 Comments

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NOTES

- DO COLLEGE PROFESSORS WORK HARD ENOUGH?**
Created by [Jo Koster](#) Mar 25, 2012 at 1:34pm. Last updated by [Jo Koster](#)
- WHO OWNS YOUR COURSE?**
Created by [Jo Koster](#) Mar 19, 2012 at 12:07pm. Last updated by [Jo Koster](#)
- STUDENT OWNERSHIP OF TABLETS INCREASES, PREFERENCE FOR GROWING**
Created by [Jo Koster](#) Mar 14, 2012 at 11:24am. Last updated by [Jo Koster](#)

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Thought
for
The Week

"I hated every minute of training, but I said, 'Don't quit. Suffer now and live the rest of your life as a champion.'"
--Muhammed Ali