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Thanks for the tough love, Miss Watson

Marjorie Watson, who taught Spanish at Furman from 1961 to 1980, died June 9 at the age of 98. A graduate of Wesleyan College in Macon, Ga., she earned a master's degree from Duke University. Before coming to Furman, she taught at Kalamazoo College in Michigan and in several high schools, including Greenville High.

She was the first language lab director at Furman and was instrumental in the development of the department's English as a Second Language program. She served as president of the South Carolina Conference on Teaching Foreign Languages, the Department of Modern Foreign Languages of the S.C. Educational Association, and the state chapter of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, which presented her the Cervantes Award, its highest honor.

On May 20, 2007, Stephen Crofts '72, a Presbyterian minister working with the Carolina Study Center near Chapel Hill, N.C., published the following tribute to Miss Watson in *The Greenville News*. We reprint it here, with permission.

Dear, dear Marjorie Watson. She taught me Spanish.

Single, up in years, married to her teaching, she was known as the hardest foreign language professor at Furman. "Don't take Watson for Spanish," was the most often repeated registration-day warning for underclassmen.

Well, I got her through a "blind registration" deal.

The first day of class she walked in, resolutely glared at us with commitment, and began:

"I'm here to teach. You're here to learn. You will come to class on time, dress neatly, wear shoes and look interested. You will not cut my class without a written excuse and 24 hours' notice or I will flunk you. You will do your homework each day, and I promise you a pop quiz each day.



"I also promise to come prepared, dress neatly and be as interesting as I know how to be, and give you all of the ability my 37 years of Spanish experience has to offer. Shall we begin?"

About half the class quietly dropped her course. The rest of us quit breathing.

I sat on the front row. I tried to look interested and intelligent.

And every day I left her class and went straight to the library to do her homework assignments. I was scared not to!

I often went to class feeling sick or missing some social event that would have been ever so much more fun. Once I missed her class for a funeral, and when I turned in my written excuse, she hugged me and told me how much she appreciated my courtesy during such a time of bereavement.

In her class I saw big, nearly grown men intimidated by her to the point of tears.

"Why don't you know the answer, Mr. Johnson? We covered it yesterday. It was in your work assignment last night. Are you satisfied with the F I'm going to give you for the day?"

"Miss Jacobs, it is obvious to me and those about you that you are not studying. A great opportunity is yours to learn another language and you are letting it slip by carelessly. How do I motivate you? Would you tell me that?"

One hard semester later I got my A from her on my report card. I can't say as I really liked the class or particularly cared for Miss Watson's singular devotion to Spanish and to teaching it to less than zealous students. But one thing she did do. She taught me discipline. She taught me obedience. And she taught me Spanish.

Years later, stepping off a train in Barcelona, the need to speak Spanish was there. I reached into my being for it, and the words were there.

And even now, opportunities still confront me, things that need doing even though there are other things I'd rather be doing. And the discipline and obedience she helped instill in me are there, too.

I never thanked Marjorie Watson, that tough, intimidating professor so married to her labor. She so loved Spanish, and taught me to love it a little, too. But still I never thanked her. Just took my grade and slipped quietly out of her class into obscurity.

But now I'd like to say, "Thank you, Marjorie Watson, for your tough love. Wherever you are, thank you."

Sometimes, it's years later that we come to see it's those who love us best who love us the toughest.

Memorials: St. Paul's United Methodist Church, 1107 S. Main Street, Greenville, S.C. 29601.