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## Linda Julian, 1946-2003

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## Linda Julian, 1946-2003

Linda Julian, who joined the Furman English faculty in 1980 and in 2002 won the Alester G. Furman, Jr., and Janie Earle Furman Award for Meritorious Teaching, died November 29 after a lengthy battle with cancer. Memorials: Linda Julian Scholarship Fund, Furman University, 3300 Poinsett Highway, Greenville, S.C. 29613.

Linda Julian was, quite literally, a colorful person. Yellow was her favorite, I think, with red a close second. Without her presence, Furman Hall would have been a considerably duller place.

Linda also had a flair for the unlikely. She began her career as a newspaper reporter, and she ended it as a specialist in Victorian literature. A native Greenvillean, teaching at Furman, she earned her Ph.D. commuting to Boston University, where a Great Literary Scholar playfully referred to her as “our little Baptist,” because Linda was the only person in the building who could confidently identify biblical allusions. (Linda was also considerably taller than that professor, I believe.)

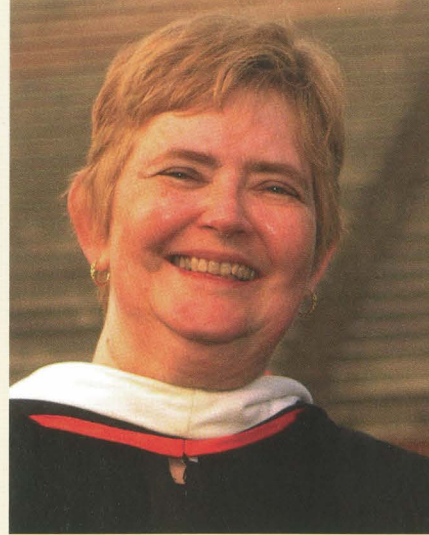
An unwavering feminist, Linda would frequently joke about the stunningly good looks of her male students — in part, to parody conventional sexism, and in part, to show her genuine appreciation for youthful beauty. (I never quite figured out the relative percentages, though.) And she certainly needed a flair for the unlikely to utter her marriage vows in the Allen living room, with its mousy brown carpet, in front of the Heatilator fireplace. At least the hearth’s ceramic tiles were yellow. My wife, Barbara, had the inspiration of giving Linda and her husband, Clark Brittain ’72, a spare tile for a keepsake — one of the most durable wedding mementoes of all time.

Every spring, for the past four years, Linda and I team-taught English 22, a survey of English and American literature since 1798. A large class (40 to 50 students), it gave us the opportunity to meet most of Furman’s new English majors and

to enjoy the scholarly enthusiasms of our colleagues in their guest lectures. We were a good team. I made the trains run on time, and Linda made sure that everyone (well, almost everyone) stayed happily on board.

Linda’s best teaching, however, occurred outside the classroom. Her office door always had a conference sheet posted nearby, overflowing with names. For years, she served as faculty advisor to the student newspaper, and she took her duties seriously. A former *Paladin* editor, Randall David Cook ’91, recalls her expert guidance: “Every Monday or Tuesday I’d meet with her and get my ‘special’ copy of the paper that had been published the Friday before, which would be covered in red ink. Her corrections. Her comments. Nothing escaped those eyes of hers, and each week I’d learn . . .” Members of the academic administration also learned that Linda could, with equal fervor, lament *The Horse*’s misadventures and invoke the First Amendment.

That eminent Victorian, Oscar Wilde, noted that it requires a very fine nature indeed to sympathize with the *success* of another person. What made Linda most remarkable, I think, was her ability to take genuine, almost flamboyant delight in the achievements of others. Whether that person was a colleague with a new manuscript (who might need her astute editorial eye), a friend with a new child (who might need her able services as a babysitter), or a freshman who’d finally managed to write an entire essay without a single comma splice (who might need her effusive but strategically deferred praise), Linda would recognize and celebrate achievement.



Hundreds of students and dozens of faculty members benefited from her scrupulous, timely encouragement. In Linda’s presence, one’s best self felt welcome and understood.

Linda and I had our last extended conversation on Saturday, November 15. Over a period of several hours, she drifted in and out of consciousness. Near the end of our on-again, off-again discussion, she mentioned a woman she’d been seeing lately, out of the corner of her eye. Linda described this woman in considerable detail. Sometimes the woman would be wearing a dark skirt, sometimes dark slacks. But she’d always have on a white blouse with a delicately pointed collar, contrasting with her black (though not artificially tinted) hair. I asked Linda if the woman was anyone she knew; if the woman had said anything to her; if the woman seemed to embody some feeling or idea. To all of these questions, Linda replied, simply, *No. She just stands there. But I’m looking forward to meeting her and talking with her.*

Meeting and talking. Talking *with*, rather than talking *to*. Linda firmly believed in what the youthful Elinor Frost called “conversation as a force in life.” She loved talking *and* listening, writing *and* reading, in equal measure. I hope she still does.

— Gilbert Allen  
Professor of English

## Williams, Thompson were former mathematics instructors

The Department of Mathematics lost two former instructors in 2003 with the deaths of Sumner McBee Williams and Miles Howlett Thompson. Williams, who taught at Furman from 1958 to 1973, died November 8 at the age of 79. Thompson, who was on the faculty from 1966 to 1976, died March 11. He was 89.

A native of Asheville, N.C., Williams was an Air Force veteran of World War II

and a recipient of the Flying Cross and Air Medal. He earned his undergraduate degree from Davidson College and his master’s from Emory University. Before coming to Furman, he taught at McCallie School in Chattanooga, Tenn., and at Westminster School in Atlanta, where he also served as principal. He was a founder of Camp High Rocks in Cedar Mountain, N.C., from which he retired in 1988.

Thompson was a graduate of the University of Missouri and held two master’s degrees, one in civil engineering from Harvard University and the other in mathematics from Duke University. He served as a government civil engineer from 1935-37 before becoming an engineer officer with the U.S. Army and Air Force, serving from 1937-64. He retired with the rank of colonel.