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## Lighting the fire

Joey Johnsen '02

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## Lighting the fire

*An alumnus pays tribute to a professor's influence*

*When Joey Johnsen '02 learned that Ronald Granieri, who joined the Furman history faculty in 1997, was moving to the University of Pennsylvania at the close of the academic year, he wrote this letter expressing his appreciation for Granieri's impact on his life. Because Johnsen's feelings are similar to those voiced through the years by thousands of Furman graduates whose lives have been touched by an influential professor, his letter is excerpted here as a tribute both to a talented teacher and to all faculty members who, as Johnsen says, "down uncertain academic corridors," guided them through their scholastic efforts, and ultimately cultivated in them a love for learning.*

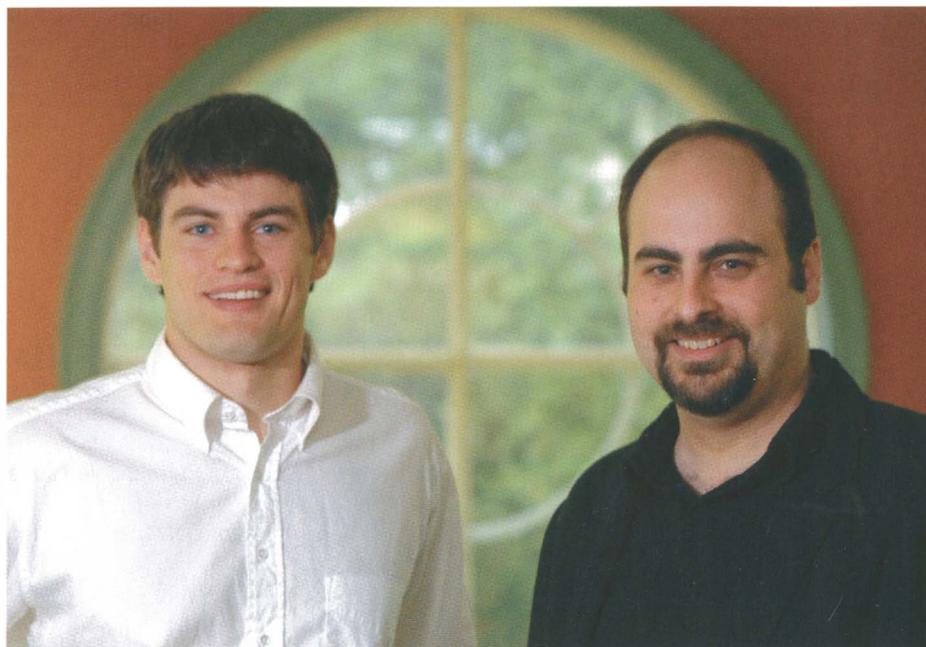
Dr. Granieri:

I came to Furman with a strong interest in writing and English. For that reason, my father urged me to sign up for the humanities sequence. In no way has any endeavor — academic or not — so dramatically affected my life for the better. Through your ferociously concerned teaching methods and holistic approach to the humanities, I discovered a love (not just a favorable tolerance) for the liberal arts.

I'll never forget my excitement upon showing up for discussion group on Beach Weekend Friday — I'll bet they don't have Beach Weekend at Penn — to find that I was one of only three students present. Yet with the same intensity with which you addressed a lecture hall of 100, you tackled our individual questions.

Flattered and eager, I posed the best question I could muster: "So, Dr. Granieri, is the Great Depression something that could have been avoided or was it an inevitable build-up from the economic and global situation of the previous 20 years?" In delectably ambiguous and complex terms, you attempted to quantify one of the most intricately interrelated catastrophes in world history into a three- or four-minute explanation, just because I had asked. To tell you the truth, I understood little of what you said and can no longer recall one word of your explanation. But the fire was lit and a passion for the search was born within me.

Perhaps that is what led me to major in history. Admittedly, I received my first



*Student and mentor enjoy a final session together.*

"B" from you, but you also whetted my appetite. Through a summer course with you in 2001 ("20th Century Europe"), we developed a friendship. We talked Cubs baseball and joked about my minimum-wage job at the mall. Through that course, I experienced your enthusiasm on a more personal scale. With your lectures as my guide, I felt the trembling of a world order, the passion of the Red Army, the divisiveness of post-war Europe, and the negotiation and collective fumbling of ideals in a perplexing new era. And I tapped a passionate and irreparably individualistic love for academics within myself.

To tell you the truth, when my senior seminar rolled around in March 2002, I could have cared less about post-war Germany. But I decided I would devote my final semester at Furman to probing just that topic because of the single word that preceded it in the course catalogue: Granieri.

With the same intensity and passion that pulled me into the history department, you held my hand along the final stretch. Regardless of the topic or book or our apparent level of interest or preparedness, you consistently evoked and nurtured engaging class discussions. In our awkwardly shaped classroom, around tables

at Barley's Pizza and Taproom, and squeezed between the pages of your office, you helped me to understand the historiography of the Frankfurt School and critical theory as a whole. With scholarly critiques and consistent guidance, you showed me how to whittle an abstract and factional philosophical movement into a subject for historical research and historiographical analysis. As during my freshman year, you helped me make sense of complex subjects without forfeiting an appreciation for the unquantifiable and still elusive aspects of the liberal arts pursuit.

Sure, you made mistakes. In humanities, we all cried to the gods when your lectures ended at 12:57 and most of us had classes to catch by 1. I probably complained and sulked like a child when I read "B" beside your name on my final freshman transcript. But your lessons were nothing if not fruitful, your passion unbridled, and your example unsurpassable.

I hope to see you again soon. But even if I don't, you will never be forgotten.

*After spending 2002-03 as an admissions counselor at Furman, Johnsen has enrolled in law school at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa.*