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Charles in Charge

John Batson '75

Gil Einstein
Furman University

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CHARLES IN CHARGE

FOR 36 YEARS AND COUNTING, BREWER HAS 'JOSTLED THE FOLKWAYS' OF FURMAN STUDENTS

Earlier this year, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates published *The Teaching of Psychology: Essays in Honor of Wilbert J. McKeachie and Charles L. Brewer*, a collection that recognizes the professors' talents as teachers and leaders in their field. The book includes a chapter about Brewer written by Furman colleague John Batson '75 (a Brewer student) and Gil Einstein. The following is adapted, with the publisher's permission, from their article.

When the Department of Psychology at Furman moved in 1998 from the dingy, cramped basement of Plyler Hall of Science into the spacious, sparkling second floor of John E. Johns Hall, the psychology majors decided that such a seismic shift in venue should be celebrated with a New Orleans-style funeral procession.

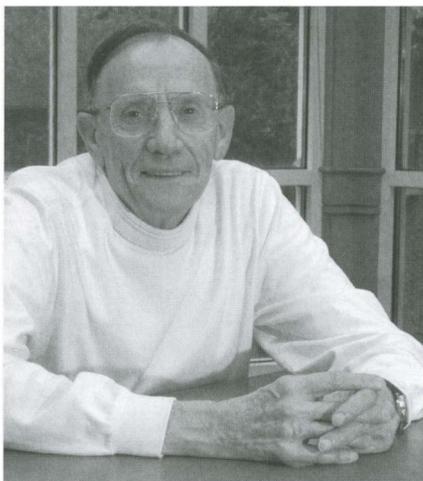
Having persuaded a trumpeter to lead the way, students and faculty marched up from the old space, accompanied by slow, mournful music. As they exited the building, however, the mood quickly changed, and the trumpeter launched into a spirited rendition of "When the Saints Go Marching In." Most of the marchers began to dance, although somewhat self-consciously, since they were standing in the middle of campus — in broad daylight.

Except for Charles L. Brewer, who had endured life in the cellar longer than anyone and who, when asked about the impending move, had responded, "I will miss the basement like I might miss cholera." Not about to let this opportunity pass, he proceeded to dance, jiggle and gyrate around campus. He even dragged the embarrassed trumpeter through the administration building and the boardroom — with a trustees meeting in session!

While some may have been taken aback by this interruption, those who know Brewer would not have been surprised by his uninhibited display.

After all, his ability to seize the moment is well documented. Every year on his birthday, students surprise him during class with a party. Sometimes the celebrations get a bit exotic, as happened the year his methods class decided to invite a belly dancer to enliven the proceedings. When the dancer unveiled her midriff, the class noted that it was decorated with one of the professor's pet phrases: "Keep Your Eyeballs on the Data." Without missing a beat Brewer joined in, matching the dancer wiggle for wiggle — and keeping his eyeballs squarely on the data.

Brewer's use of humor to reinforce lecture material has long endeared him to students. In a general psychology class many years ago, he taught the Freudian



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principle of sexual fixations, and then asked the class what Freud would say about his owning a large Volkswagen van. When teaching about successive approximation, he once crawled on top of the desk and oinked like a pig in response to reinforcement from the class.

Generations of students can still recall plenty of "Brewerisms," such as his standard advice about research reports: "Write with clarity, conciseness and felicity of expression." As for students planning to conduct research, Brewer often reminds them that "things always take longer than they do."

The professor's wit and style, combined with his passion for scientific psychology, stimulating classroom presence and rigorous expectations, have earned him legendary status almost since the day he arrived at Furman in 1967. His impact was so immediate that, in 1969, he was named the first recipient of the Alester G. Furman, Jr., and Janie Earle Furman Award for Meritorious Teaching.

Since then he has earned a host of other honors, including the 1989 Award for Distinguished Teaching in Psychology from the American Psychological Association and, in 1995, the APA's Award for Distinguished Career Contributions to Education and Training in Psychology.

Brewer believes that the best teachers are those who, in his words, are willing to "jostle some folkways." Students may at times complain about his requirements or the difficulty of his tests, but in the end they usually wind up boasting about how much they learned from him. More telling is evidence of Brewer's lasting impact: More than 100 of his former students have earned Ph.D. degrees in psychology.

His commitment to students extends to his colleagues and to his profession. Many a young professor, struggling to establish a foothold in the classroom, has benefited from Brewer's expertise, encouragement and support. As longtime editor of the APA's *Teaching of Psychology*, he has published a journal held in the highest regard throughout the academic community, and he has served as a consulting editor for many psychology textbooks. In addition, he is recognized as one of the country's leading experts on undergraduate psychology curricula and is frequently asked to evaluate college psychology departments.

As Brewer is fond of pointing out, it is often difficult to know where a teacher's influence ends. In his case, the geometric progression produces a span of influence that is nearly infinite.

Every Furman student who has taken psychology during the last 36 years has come under the influence, either directly or indirectly, of Charles Brewer. Through his devotion to students' best interests and his record of service to Furman and the academic community, he has demonstrated that he is one of the university's — and the nation's — true teaching talents.

The Department of Psychology has established an endowment fund to honor Charles L. Brewer's ongoing contributions as a teacher, scholar and mentor. Proceeds from the Brewer Endowment Fund will create special learning opportunities for undergraduate psychology majors. To learn more, contact Bob Fuzy (bob.fuzy@furman.edu) or Jane Dungan (jane.dungan@furman.edu) in the Office of Major Gifts, (864) 294-3732.