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## University community loses three longtime professors: William E. Leverette, Jr.

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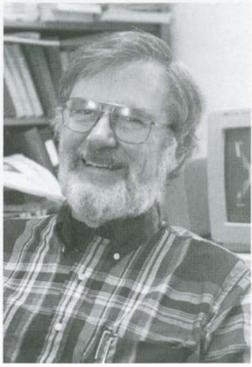
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**From left, Roy Lindahl, Dick Maag and Bill Leverette combined to provide many years of inspiration to Furman students.**

learn to make music — and in the larger question of music’s role in life. I remember one of his “honest moments” in a music faculty meeting, when he put us in our places by saying that “we couldn’t call ourselves music educators unless we knew that Aerosmith was a rock band and not an airplane mechanic.”

But my words alone are not enough to encapsulate this remarkable person’s influence. During his illness, Dick received a number of special messages from friends, colleagues and former students.

A.V. Huff, vice president for academic affairs and dean, wrote to Dick: “As a teacher, no one has meant more to his students than you. If I had to pick out someone who best exemplified the kind of teaching that we all aspire to, you would be the model of that teacher. . . . You have always given of your best, not only in your playing but also in your continuing search for knowledge.”

Dick’s former teacher at the University of Texas, Phyllis Young, stressed his contributions as a mentor: “Through his attitude and actions, he reminded us what life is all about.” And indeed, in *The Courage to Teach*, Parker Palmer writes, “The power of our mentors is not necessarily in the models of good teaching they gave us. . . . Their powers are in their capacity to awaken a truth within us, a truth we can reclaim years later by recalling the impact on our lives.”

## William E. Leverette, Jr.

*These remarks were delivered March 15 during a memorial service at Furman:*

Of all my fond memories of Bill Leverette, my thoughts go back to my first one-on-one conversation with him.

It was a deceptively mundane episode in the winter term of 1980. I believe Bill was in his first term back after his heart attack, teaching “U.S. History 1890 to 1941,” a course that I have inherited from him. I was, at the time, a sophomore English major, before Leverette had drawn me into his circle and into the history department. (I now, like many of his students, mark my life in terms of “pre-Leverette” and “post-Leverette.”)

I was in my second or third history class at Furman, a fairly bright but unfocused and somewhat uninspired student. A week or so into the term, I approached Professor Leverette to discuss a book that we were reading — a book long since forgotten, which is telling since I remember everything else about the encounter.

As we talked about the book, Bill pulled a string of small, hard candy from his vest pocket, then produced a Swiss army knife from his pants pocket, cut the string, and ate a piece of candy. As the discussion about the book waned, Bill offered me a piece of candy, I think expecting me — a linebacker on the football team — to manfully break the string. Instead, I pulled from my pocket a small, single-blade pocketknife with a bone handle, cut the string, and ate my candy.

When the history lesson ended, Bill took an interest in my knife and we shifted seamlessly to a discussion of pocketknives and the virtues of his Swiss-army style versus my basic single-blade. He pointed out the advantages of multiple blades and tools. I countered with the notion that a single blade was enough for most uses, and that such an elemental tool ought to have a natural handle rather than the synthetic red plastic of a Swiss army knife.

Anna Barbrey Joiner ’79, instructor of viola and chamber music at Furman, said she was “awakened to the truth” when she was a student and Dick suggested that she play the viola because, in his words, “she had a viola personality.” Anna said, “It took me four years to discover that for myself, but he planted the seed that eventually flowered into the professional career I enjoy today.”

Dick Maag understood the glories of making music and the long-lasting influence a good teacher can have. But more than that, he understood the value of life outside one’s profession. He truly loved and valued his friends, and he never failed to acknowledge how meaningful your friendship was to him.

We will be forever blessed by the lessons about life and love that serve as his legacy to each of us.

— John Beckford  
Professor of Music

*Memorials: The Richard R. Maag Endowed Scholarship at Furman, 3300 Poinsett Highway, Greenville, S.C. 29613; First Church of Christ Scientist, 45 Southland Avenue, Greenville, S.C. 29601; or Music Fund, First Presbyterian Church, 200 West Washington Street, Greenville, S.C. 29601.*

I had no idea at the time, but given Bill’s strong preference for simplicity over unnecessary complexity and for things natural over those artificial, I had said just the right thing. It was entirely appropriate that our friendship began in a conversation that started on an academic topic and concluded with a chat about a symbol of our shared love of the outdoors.

Today, what makes that episode meaningful is the way Bill so naturally turned our conversation from the academic and intellectual to the personal and practical. That transition was an instinctive part of Bill’s teaching and his personality. He always sought to connect with his students on some common ground so that he could pull us onto the unfamiliar and sometimes threatening, but always rewarding, turf of ideas and the intellect.

In this regard, Bill, though a complicated man, was an integrated man. There was a close connection between what he did for a living and who he was, between what he taught and wrote about and how he lived. His study of history, especially ideas in history, profoundly shaped how he acted in the world. And he revealed to us, his students, how the study of history could be, and should be, a tool in shaping who we were and who we would become.

I have absorbed some of Bill’s teaching style and much of his outlook on nature and the relationship of the individual to institutions and society. But more than that, I aspire to match his dedication to the art of teaching, to the power of ideas, and to the importance of individual relationships in the academic enterprise.

As a teacher and as a person, I am at my best when I am inspired by Bill Leverette’s example.

— Steve O’Neill ’82  
Associate Professor of History

*Memorials: The William E. Leverette Endowment Fund at Furman, 3300 Poinsett Highway, Greenville, S.C. 29613; or the Sierra Club.*