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Taylor '63

If you have ever been overcome with excitement when stumbling upon a contrary-to-fact conditional clause, it may be because you had Daniel Taylor '63 for a teacher at some point in your life. That is the kind of magical imprint Taylor left on the students who spent time in his ornate Main Hall classroom, adorned with the busts of the great and famous of the ancient world.

A classicist first and foremost but also a linguist who reveled in tackling the study of language with the scientific abandon of a biologist in search of new breakthrough, Taylor's passion has been "explaining a difficult grammatical construction to my students and seeing the light bulb go off in their heads."

For 33 years, Taylor, who retired in June, enthusiastically and animatedly turned on imaginary cranial light bulbs, making it his mission to adamantly prove Latin and Greek were anything but dead languages, bringing to life in his own inimitable way the words of Homer and Horace in their original languages. His career and contributions to Lawrence were recognized at Commencement with an honorary Master of Arts degree and professor emeritus status.

"Dan believed Latin was a living and breathing force that continued to exert an influence over us, an idea he communicated with the utmost cogency and conviction," recalls Malcolm Hyman '93, of Providence, R.I. "None of his students will ever forget his teaching style: vigorous and humorous but also erudite and rigorous. When a student once asked what she would need to know for the final exam, Dan replied, 'only two things: all the grammar and all the vocabulary.'"

Meanwhile, back at Lawrence

A 1963 graduate of Lawrence, Taylor's return to his alma mater was hardly the result of a carefully crafted career plan. When he graduated with his own degree in classics, he was certain only a large university would be able to accommodate his research interests.

But, six years on the faculty at the University of Illinois, with its bureaucratic red tape and isolating atmosphere, left him professionally wanting. Little did he know, but Maurice Cunningham, his mentor at Lawrence, had been keeping tabs on him. After what may be one of the shortest job interviews in Lawrence annals, Taylor found himself headed back to Main Hall.

"Maurice called me in Champaign one evening and in his typical cut-to-the-chase-style, simply said, 'You want to come

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By Rick Peterson

up here and get ready to replace me?’ I said, ‘Sure, that sounds good.’ And that was that,” says Taylor.

The move soon disproved Taylor’s notion that bigger was better. After joining the faculty in 1974, his reputation rose steadily as he established himself as the world’s leading scholar on Marcus Terentius Varro, ancient Rome’s foremost authority on Roman language science. He wrote two books on Varro, including *Varro De Lingua Latina X: A New Critical Text and English Translation with Prolegomena*, which culminated nearly 20 years of research on Varro’s once-lost seminal manuscript. He also edited the book *The History of Linguistics in the Classical Period*, which has become one of the most frequently cited texts in the field of classical linguistics.

Along the way, his work in the classroom was repeatedly recognized as well, garnering Lawrence’s own Award for Excellence in Teaching in 1998 as well as similar honors from the American Philological Association (1983) and the Wisconsin Association of Foreign Language Teachers (1990).

“I was able to do all the scholarship here that I thought I would only be able to do at a large university,” says Taylor, appointed the Hiram A. Jones Professor of Classics in 1991. “I’ve been fortunate enough to have a remarkable career, and I was able to do it all in the context of a liberal arts college environment.”

Advisor, teacher, and friend

Martha Kreher “Dert” Stevenson ’78, of Wilmington, Mass., was one of Taylor’s first students at Lawrence. Her son, Alexander ’07, was one of his last, forming family bookends to a notable career.

“Dan was a trusted advisor, a favorite teacher, and plain ‘adult friend’ to a girl from the boonies of northern Wisconsin who had only taken Latin as a correspondence course and whose confidence warranted boosting,” Stevenson says. “I found a professor who could laugh at what seemed to be life’s travails and help show that what seemed monumental at the moment would be all right if we just remained rational. All these years later I still see him that way.”

As befitting a Latin scholar, Taylor found himself in Italy on numerous occasions, including twice as the recipient of National Endowment for the Humanities fellowships — the only Lawrence faculty member ever awarded two NEH grants — and as the first Fulbright Distinguished Chair in Linguistics at the University of Trieste. His first visit was made without the security of being able to speak Italian.

“I was on page 69 of *Italian Made Simple* when the plane

landed,” Taylor says with a laugh. “That should have made me nervous, but I was too young and too dumb to know better.”

Throughout his career, he also immersed himself in the greater campus community, pinch-hitting for a year as dean of students, where he initiated the Campus Life Award as a way of recognizing out-of-classroom experiences. He also founded (and is still playing on) a faculty/staff community softball team, and he channeled his love of soccer into support for the Vikings’ women’s and men’s teams.

When Mary Taylor Vogel ’82’s 17-year-old son received an information packet touting “the Lawrence Difference,” and he asked her what that meant, she eventually came to a two-word answer: Dan Taylor.

“The Lawrence Difference is a friendly stranger in a cowboy hat greeting me the first day I walked onto campus,” Vogel, of Oak Park, Ill., told the audience at a Reunion Weekend reception for Taylor. “Though he had no idea at the time that I was interested in a classics major, he made me feel like Lawrence was the place I belonged.

“The Difference is a world-class scholar, a teacher whose passion for the ancient world overflows, a teacher who holds very high expectations for his students and works tirelessly to assure that his students meet them, a mentor whose inspiration led me to my career in teaching, a friend who could be found reminiscing about his college days or asking you about yours over a beer in the Viking Room on a Friday afternoon.”

While he will miss the interaction and constant invigoration he received from his students — which he says kept him young — Taylor is looking forward to trading scholarship for ski slopes as he transitions from Appleton to the Colorado Rockies west of Denver. When he isn’t busy “swooshing,” he’ll look for mental stimulation in a pair of books he still hopes to write.

If it were up to Chris Wogaman ’97, of Berkeley, Calif., he’d add a third tome to Taylor’s retirement “to-do” list.

“I’ve always figured that if Dan would ever write a memoir of his many years of scholarly expeditions and adventures, the title would have to be *Arrivederci, Dan*,” said Wogaman. “That is how he always signs his letters and e-mails, and nothing says it better: till we meet again — I can’t wait to see you. If you asked him what this simple word means, he’d no doubt give you the Latin derivation as well as the English equivalent. Now, with his retirement, “arrivederci, Dan” takes on a whole new meaning.” ■