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Retirees Look Back on the Years

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Retirees look back on the years

Three longtime Linfield College faculty members – Kareen Sturgeon, Howard Leichter and Linda Olds – along with alumni they have influenced, share memories of the past and plans for the future at retirement.



Kareen Sturgeon, professor of biology since 1981

Favorite course: What I liked best about the courses I taught was the variety. Some were largely descriptive; others were more conceptually challenging. Some had substantial field and lab components; others were more lecture or discussion-based. I was never bored!

“All rising to a great place is by a winding stair...” Sir Francis Bacon. That was the handwritten quote on a card accompanying my graduation gift from Kareen Sturgeon. She told me that there would be times when I would take a few steps forward, times when I would take a few steps back, and times when I would take a totally different direction, but remember...all the while still climbing. There are many gems that Kareen has passed on to me over the years, but this one singularly relieved me of great personal burden. I didn't have to be a prodigy, an expert on anything, or even wealthy.

Kareen is passionate about the art of teaching, the subjects she teaches, the students that she encounters and simply about learning. When a person is that passionate, people can see it and it is infectious. That kind of passion makes learning all the more fun. Kareen is dedicated to her students, friends and family. She has always been multidisciplinary in her approach. She is skilled in making connections to what she is studying. It is not just the plant we study, but the habitat, socioeconomics, climate, history, culture and politics in the area.

– Judy Lum '89, assistant research coordinator and assistant private non-profit hatchery coordinator, Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Learned from students and colleagues:

For me, the best part of being a teacher is that I never stopped learning from students and colleagues. No question, they taught me how to be a better scientist, person and friend.

Retirement plans: I look forward to having the freedom to “do nothing” and to see where that leads me.



If there is one single person who positively influenced my academic experience at Linfield, and consequently my life choices in the years following, above all others, it is Howard Leichter. He was a mentor in the most genuine sense of the word.

Howard was notorious for demanding the most of students, a quality I credit with developing unparalleled critical thinking skills and work habits of an entire generation of Linfield political science majors. He was the toughest grader, but he was also the most constructive. He demanded the most from his students because he knew we were all capable of great things, and was unwilling to sit idly by while we ignored our potential.

He never shied from being self-deprecating to lighten the mood, especially when he showed up to class missing a belt, wearing mismatched socks or even two different shoes after coming directly from the gym.

I simply would not be where I am today had I not signed up for that American Politics class with “the hardest professor at Linfield.”

— Rob Johnson '05, government affairs representative, Oregon Health Care Association

Howard Leichter, professor of political science since 1980

Most memorable moment: When I found out that I won a Fulbright to England.

Favorite campus hangout: The swimming pool

Favorite course: The Study of Public Policy

Changes in students: Less engaged in politics, more engaged in community service

Learned from students and colleagues: Humility

Person you most want to emulate: My wife, Elisabeth

Retirement plans: Writing, fly fishing, international travel, hiking, reading



It’s difficult for me to put into words how influential Linda has been in my life. She has been such a tremendous role model. I recall her genuine care for students and also her intellectual integrity as a teacher. Both of those are attributes I try to emulate in my own work as a professor now, and Linda is a constant inspiration to me.

I remember when I was completing my senior thesis and about to graduate, Linda invited me to her home one day for lunch and to talk over my project. I still vividly recall sitting around her dining room table, eating homemade soup and talking about my paper. She treated me as an almost-colleague, and it was such an honor.

Her love of ideas, her high standards, and her humor made her a very popular and memorable teacher. I took every class she offered and still find myself referring back to some of the books she assigned in her courses 30 years ago.

— Ann Johnson '79, professor of psychology, University of St. Thomas, St. Paul

Linda Olds, professor of psychology since 1975

Most memorable moment: Times when a class truly comes alive as a community of inquirers and tastes the excitement of collaborative thinking and learning.

Favorite campus hangout: Classrooms (during and after a class) and the Oak Grove.

On learning: True learning is self-motivated.

Changes in students: Becoming an active learner is as exciting and daunting a quest as ever at the heart of education.

Retirement plans: Retirement feels more like a beginning, an opportunity to focus on the integrative writing and themes I have always loved, culminating from a lifetime of teaching and scholarship.