

July 15, 2009

If you were a Political Science major at UWSP between 1963 and 1996 it is almost certain that you knew Mark Cates. For that matter, if you were a faculty member in the College of Letters And Science or a student trying to fulfill the Social Science requirement for your degree chances are you knew, or at least knew of, Mark Cates. And if you knew Mark Cates, you respected Mark Cates.

Mark came to UWSP in 1963 and became a fixture in the growing, then shrinking, then stabilizing Political Science Department he meant so much to and that meant so much to him. During his very first semester on campus Mark left his small office in Old Main in search of a television when he heard that President Kennedy had been shot. During the unrest over Vietnam and the disgust over Watergate, he remained the steady calming presence trying to convince those generations of undergraduates that we had seen and weathered worse. More often than not, he succeeded.

Mark was a man of rituals and routines. When the teaching day was done he would stop for a drink and a bit of conversation. For years he stopped at the Silver Coach to talk to his friend Pete Redfield. When Pete no longer ran the Silver Coach it was The Hot Fish Shop where he remembered the bartender from her days at the magnificent bar at the Hotel Whiting. And every now and then there was the Unique, long before it was moved and became the Unique, the Nitty Gritty, and eventually GUU's on Main. But though his rituals and routines may have seemed one dimensional to many, his tastes were anything but. Mark loved the comedy of W.C. Fields. More than once he stuck his head in my office door and asked, "Did I spend a \$20 bill in here last night?" When I dutifully said yes, he said, "Thank God, I thought I'd lost it." He loved the screwball comedies of the 1930s, the great musicals, even the Westerns. He loved the music of Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman, and Louis Armstrong. But as much as he loved those things, his passion was for Verdi, Puccini, and above all Mozart. Mark was a true opera lover, never missing a Saturday broadcast of what was then Texaco Presents the Metropolitan Opera. In fact, he often came into the office and listened on a little old radio he kept there mostly for news updates.

When his mother died and left him a bit of money, Mark quietly established a scholarship to be awarded by the department each year. He wouldn't take credit for having done so for years, so it was just the Political Science Department Scholarship until he finally came clean about how it was funded. Now it is the Mark Cates Political Science Department Scholarship and it is the most prestigious award we give. He has also funded other scholarships and three of our alumni from Mark's early days here have endowed another scholarship in his name.

In the end, if you were to ask Mark to describe his time at UWSP he would, of course, first give you that look that indicated you were in dangerous territory, but, when the look had faded he would have said, I taught here. And teach he did. Three Excellence in Teaching Awards are certainly testimony to that. But beyond – and behind – the awards are the hundreds, even thousands, of alumni who still call him teacher, mentor, and friend.

We miss you Mark. I miss you Mark.

Dennis