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Retired

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Variety Leads to Longevity

by Walter H. Johnson

Prior to my retirement a few years ago, I had completed 51 years in the teaching profession, the final 43 at a New Jersey community college. I left for reasons other than burnout, and if my health permitted, I might still be there. I ascribe my longevity to the variety of courses I was qualified to teach; these included English Fundamentals, English Composition I and II, American Literature, Modern American Literature, Children’s Literature, Effective Speech, and Theatre Appreciation. Combinations of these disciplines filled my course load each semester, and this easily prevented boredom.

I admit that I was very lucky for being allowed to exercise this variety, but my two master’s degrees helped, as did a personal love for theatre (and several graduate-level courses). My colleagues showed no animosity toward my schedule; in fact, with one exception, our department experienced a closeness that other divisions envied. This air of camaraderie also contributed to my longevity.

Let me explain that one exception, lest I give the impression that someone can experience 43 years of pure bliss in any educational environment. For a brief period in the early years at my college, a department chair was hired who apparently took issue with a few members, including me. I say “apparently” because there were no confrontations involved. However, one summer afternoon while she and I were alone in the secretary’s area, she asked which courses were my favorites. I was quick to reply, “Effective Speech and Theatre Appreciation.” When the fall semester arrived, a new instructor had been hired to teach Speech and Theatre. I felt I was demoted and not a little let down. But two years later, the “new” hire was let go, and the following year the chair herself resigned. This turned out to be a small obstruction in my career—nothing that led to thoughts of leaving.

I do understand the nature of burnout; for example, a course load of Composition could easily become tedious. There are not many students who approach writing with enthusiasm, so instructors need an extreme amount of patience, and this cannot last for years without end.

My advice to teachers new to the profession is to prepare a background that allows for variety such as I was fortunate enough to establish. This might mean graduate courses at a local university, perhaps in the summertime. This show of ambition could work heavily in their favor. High school teachers can qualify to teach honors courses, whose enrollment is close to 100 percent interested and even talented students. With a favorable course load, there should be little need to count the days or years to retirement.

Walter H. Johnson taught for 43 years at Cumberland County College in Vineland, New Jersey; upon my retirement he was granted emeritus status. He is proud to have had articles published in *The New Jersey English Journal* in all but one or two issues since its inception in 1987. In his retirement, Johnson has especially enjoyed traveling, which is on hold at present as he recovers from a kidney transplant, but after the sixth-month, he looks forward to resuming that hobby.



Artwork by Maggie Boyce-Blanchard