Taylor Made A Difference For This Alumna

I was saddened to hear of the passing of Professor William Taylor, who taught at SIU between 1955 and 1970. I met him at a high school vocal music contest where he served as a judge, and he invited my parents to bring me to Carbondale for a visit to the School of Music. My parents had never visited a college campus, as this man opened a door for me that had never been opened for my parents.

I think my mother was determined to push right through that door. I’m not sure how she did it on my dad’s coal miner pay, but Mom found the funds to take our family to the SIU Summer Music Theater founded by Taylor. This was an incredible experience for a family that had never seen a live musical production. There we sat in awe with other families from all over southern Illinois, watching Camelot, The Sound of Music, Kiss Me Kate, Mame, Oklahoma, Most Happy Fella, and A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum – all in an Ag School arena that had been miraculously transformed into a theater.

We were all mesmerized, transported. The orchestra, the costumes, the scenery, the makeup, the lights – it was Broadway, not an Ag School, and we had Taylor’s vision and drive to thank for it. Thanks to him and that musical theater program, I enjoyed my most memorable times at SIU.

Taylor and his wife, Donna, an academic advisor, were the ultimate SIU duo dedicated to the development and success of their students. They were surrogate parents who helped me and many others maneuver the obstacles and challenges that confront the first in a family in attending college.

A father of four, Taylor was equally at home singing the lead in an opera, as he was working in his wood shop. If I ever achieved one single moment of musical success, it was because I could hear his beautiful baritone voice booming, “Sing from your heart, Cindy!”

I was brokenhearted to hear of his passing and will be eternally indebted to him and Donna for their part in shaping my life.

Cindy Painter ’72
Life Member
Chuckey, Tenn.

Touching Base From Northern Ireland

Living in Northern Ireland, I just recently received my winter copy of SIU Alumni magazine in the mail. I just wanted to touch base and say that I thought it was a great read. My thanks to Gene Green for the great cover story on Connie Price-Smith and her husband, John.

My first year at SIU was in 1980, and John was the first to step up and welcome me, inviting me to his home for Thanksgiving. I won’t forget that. Connie and John are “rock stars” on this side of the pond!

The Breen family is pictured reunited on the SIU campus several years ago. Tom was a four-year letterman on the SIU track and field and cross country teams from 1980-84. His daughter, Gina ’06, ’07, M.A. ’10, later arrived from Ireland to earn three degrees and serve the Association as a member of the Student Alumni Council. She is currently working on her Ph.D. at Louisiana State University.

Congratulations to you all for the great work you do for the University.

Go Salukis!

Tom Breen ’84
Life Member
Downpatrick, Northern Ireland

Dear Readers...

Your SIU Alumni Association is always eager to hear from you. As with all magazines, we can only improve if we are being responsive to you, our readers. We encourage you to take a moment to comment on something you have read in SIU Alumni magazine, or to let us know what you are thinking. Letters are sometimes edited for length and style.

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