Memorial Resolution

Harold N. Ahlgren

Harold N. (Hal) Ahlgren, Professor Emeritus of Mass Communication, died March 21 at St. Mary’s Hospital in Grand Rapids, Michigan, at the age of 88. He had been ill for some years with Parkinson’s disease. The last years of his retirement were spent in his boyhood town of Big Rapids, Michigan.

Professor Ahlgren came to Milwaukee in 1946 as a member of the English Department of Milwaukee State College. He taught courses in journalism and served as advisor to the student newspaper and yearbook. When the College was merged with UW-Extension in 1956 to become the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, he was named chairman of the newly created Department of Journalism. He held that post until 1962.

Before coming to Milwaukee, he taught journalism at West Virginia Wesleyan College and at Wayne State University in Michigan. He received his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in journalism from Northwestern University.

Professor Ahlgren’s warm, friendly personality won him many friends among students and faculty. A captivating conversationalist with a seemingly limitless range of interests, he had the happy quality of making people feel good about themselves. He cared, and it showed.

Hal was always very close to his students. He served as adviser to student publications at a time when the position required control over news and editorial policy. The tact and patience with which he handled this assignment won him the total respect of his young journalists.

Reporters and editors at the student newspaper office paid rapt attention to the “bloody sheet” which Hal posted on the bulletin board after each issue. Pages of the paper were marked up with red ink showing Hal’s reactions, favorable and unfavorable, to the staff’s performance.

Hal helped to develop an annual variety show sponsored by the student newspaper. At one time the event, called PEAK night, was a high spot on the student activities calendar. Held in Mitchell Hall Auditorium, it show-cased student talent, with prizes for top performances.

The tradition included a faculty skit, usually written by the late John Paul Jones of the Speech Department. Hal invariably played a leading role in these skits, one of the most memorable as an angel, complete with white robe, halo and wings.
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For many years Hal was a faculty representative on SLIC--the Student Life and Interest Committee--which at the time controlled most student extracurricular activity on campus.

Hal’s teaching methods won him the affection of his students. Years later they would reminisce about his reporting classes and the colorful characters who inhabited the imaginary town Hal created. Class members interviewed the townspeople--all played by Hal--then check names and addresses in the town directory. Woe to the student who misspelled a name or garbled information. Hal never resorted to ridicule, but his ready wit could turn a reportorial mistake into a good class laugh. His course in Public Relations drew students from departments all over the campus.

At graduation, Hal presented each journalism major with a hardcover copy of Benjamin Franklin’s Autobiography.

When Hal retired in 1967, students and alumni organized a dinner party in his honor at the Cafe Rouge of the Pfister Hotel. The place was filled to capacity--a fitting tribute to a beloved teacher.

Garold L. Bartness
Kenneth G. Johnson