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A Tribute to Charlie Angell

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A Tribute to Charlie Angell

A long-time Book Review Editor for Bridgewater Review, English Professor, former union president and student advisor without peer, Dr. Charles F. Angell passed away on June 13, 2012, just days before our last issue went to press—too soon for us to honor him properly with a tribute, and just plain too soon. What follows are words written by some of Charlie’s colleagues who knew him personally and professionally, and who attest to the deep and lasting effect that he made in his time with us at Bridgewater State. BR

Charlie Angell was blessed with many gifts, skills and talents. His life can be described as one of unlimited generosity and kindness, a lifelong commitment to learning, a passion for classical music, and of course a deep and caring love of his family. One of Charlie’s great gifts was his insatiable desire to read and to use the knowledge gained from books to help all of us appreciate the written word. Charlie was truly a man of letters.

I came to appreciate Charlie’s great reading gift when he served as the Book Review Editor for Bridgewater Review. His writing was always clear and concise; his commentary was often poignant, sometimes hilarious, but always thoughtful. Charlie reviewed books on politics, social change, economic conditions, famous people, music, art, fiction and non-fiction, high commentary and low blather. There was no area of writing that he was not interested in and willing to put 750 words to paper, always done with a literary flourish and grand style. Charlie’s work as Book Review Editor revealed an accomplished scholar, a man who believed in the life of the mind, a man dedicated to making Bridgewater State a university that never forgot the importance of good writing and, most of all, the power of the book. One of my final memories of Charlie was when I visited him in the hospital; there he was, smiling and brave, with a Kindle in hand, books strewn around the bed—the Book Review Editor of Bridgewater Review.

When you are friends with someone for more than thirty years and have lunch with that person three or four times a week, a special bond is created and memories are boundless. Charlie could always be counted on during those lunches to offer a brilliant turn of a word or phrase that had his friends at the table in stitches. Charlie was a man of great generosity; he often took students to the opera or plays or lectures to introduce them to parts of our culture that are too often ignored. And Charlie was always there for people, whether it was helping me paint my house, baking bread for his friends, mentoring his faculty colleagues, or sitting patiently while advising a nervous student.

A university is only as good as the people who stand in front of a class of young people and open their minds to the world. Charlie was one of those English professors who made students think, not only about a poem or short story that was assigned, but about the larger meaning of the works; how the reading defined their lives or made their world more understandable. Such skills in teaching and thinking are in short supply these days, but Charlie had them in huge amounts.

When someone passes from this earth, the living have only memories. But I have hundreds of memories of Charlie, all of them good, all of them a treasure.

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Amidst all those memories, I will never forget how Charlie made those around him—family, friends, students and staff—appreciate the wonders of reading, the importance of lifelong learning and the absolute necessity of critical thinking. That was Charlie’s gift to all of us.

Michael Kryzanek is the Director of the Global Studies Institute and Executive Director of the Center for International Engagement. He was Founding Editor of Bridgewater Review (1982-2010).

A life is a complicated business, difficult to capture in words. That’s the sadness of death, isn’t it? Unless you were lucky enough to experience the fullness of a person, no story, no photograph, no loving description can convey the richness of a human being. Even when we know others in life, too often the person they are evades us. We get a glimpse here, an idea there, but rarely the whole man or woman. And yet we try; we try to make ourselves understood and known to one another, and we try to keep the memory of those who have died alive as a way of keeping them alive in our own hearts.

The mind plays tricks, and sometimes I think I catch Charlie out of the corner of my eye – driving past my house on his way to work or crossing the quadrangle toward Tillinghast, wearing a fishing vest and baseball cap if he wasn’t teaching or, for more formal occasions, a slightly stained, goofy tie and Oxford shirt. But that is, of course, just the shadow of the man who was my dear friend for 15 years, who took me under his wing when I was a junior faculty member and protected me from dangers real and imagined; who instilled his love of music and politics and photography in my daughter, Nina; who told me stories and bad jokes and speculated on national elections and department politics with equal zeal. Charlie was a vivid person, a vibrant man full of ideas and energy and opinions. I wish not to diminish him in the retelling.

I understand Charlie best when I think of him in the place he came from: New England. Charlie liked to joke that he had spent most of his life at one spot or another along Route 106, from Plymouth to East Bridgewater, and though he and Leslie had traveled extensively throughout Europe and the United States, Charlie was in some ways a modern Thoreau, who himself joked about having traveled widely in Concord. Like the Concord Transcendentalists, and in the best New England colonial tradition, Charlie was deeply introspective – and very hard on himself and his real or perceived failings. He had a powerful, almost overwhelming desire to be useful, to make a difference, and to care for others, and his unhappiness when he felt he was missing his own mark was palpable. About six years ago, Charlie became discontented with the quality of his teaching in literature courses, but he still loved our students and wasn’t ready to retire, believing he had more to give to BSU. After a bit of poking around, we found him a second career working as an advisor in the Academic Achievement Center. Charlie brought love, time, care and his vast knowledge of the inner workings of BSU to his advising work. Every day he had a new story about a student he helped snatch from the jaws of academic catastrophe,
or simply guided into a more fitting major. His work in the AAC, like his early leadership in the MSCA, his life in teaching, and his unceasing service in the English Department, had meaning for him and those around him. It allowed him to do, as his New England predecessor Cotton Mather demanded we do, “some good each day.”

Charlie was a writer; a gardener; a voracious and perceptive reader; a doting family man; an admirer of Lady Gaga and Bach - both; a teacher; a lover of argument and wine and conversation. He was all those things, but the list does not add up to the man. He gave me the precious gift of his friendship, and taught me a standard of professionalism and collegiality that I can only hope to live up to. I miss him every day, and like many of you reading this now, I am thankful for his love, his work, and his life.

*Ann Brunjes is Acting Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs, on leave from her position as Associate Professor in the English Department.*

Anyone who worked with Charlie was aware of his wit, wide-ranging curiosity and seriousness about learning. But the quality of Charlie’s that I admired most was his generous heart.

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harlie was a great colleague and friend of mine at Bridgewater, but it was outside the campus that my fondest memories of Charlie were formed. Sailing was the one place I had Charlie pretty much to myself. He loved the trips we took on board our boat, *Otter*. As soon as we were out of inner Sippican Harbor he would eagerly take the helm. “Where are we going today?” he’d ask, sounding like a kid at the beginning of a rare adventure. Red Brook Harbor, Quissett, West Island, Hadley Harbor near Woods Hole (his favorite), Lake Tashmoo on the Vineyard? Most afternoons we heeled so sharply that *Otter*’s rail was under the water. Charlie called these conditions Buzzards Bay snorters, and was always thrilled by them. One gray afternoon in six-foot seas just south of Cleveland Ledge Light he spotted a huge leatherback turtle in the face of a wave. Picture this most articulate of men reduced to blurt out “Holy *****, Holy *******.” Every sail he was as delighted as a child who’d never been before. So was I.

Anyone who worked with Charlie was aware of his wit, wide-ranging curiosity and seriousness about learning. But the quality of Charlie’s that I admired most was his generous heart. He seemed always to be thinking of how he could show his affection for other people. He frequently surprised people with gifts that were completely about them. For me, a poster-sized photograph he had taken of *Otter* and a 19th century chart of the cove where she is moored. A book for someone he’d just met that was discussed in their first-ever conversation. His concert tickets when he and his wife, Leslie, could not attend. And, of course, his generous heart was always on display at lunch with his friends when he praised the people he loved: Leslie, the best-read and most charismatic teacher ever, with students lined up in the hall outside her office, waiting to talk with her about school and life; his son, Franklin, movie-star handsome and, as an early teen, absolutely bound for a career as a major-league pitcher (Charlie told us at lunch one day that Franklin could throw a baseball through a sheet of plywood. “How thick could the plywood be?” someone asked. As always, Charlie was ready. With no pause he shot back, “three quarter inch, exterior grade”); and his beloved granddaughter, Hadley, just the brightest, chattiest and most beautiful child ever.

Today, trying to express what I feel about Charlie, and how much I’ll miss him, I know that I have no way to capture his warmth, open curiosity, generosity, humor, loyalty, sense of fairness, honesty and pleasure in the company of those he loved. I’ll just have to make do with having had Charlie as a friend for more than 35 lucky years.

*William Levin is Emeritus Professor of Sociology and a former Associate Editor (1982-2010) and Editor (2010-12) of Bridgewater Review.*
When the faculty and librarians at Bridgewater State College elected him as their first-ever Massachusetts State College Association (MSCA) Chapter President, Charlie Angell faced a daunting task: leading a brand new union with a divided membership. The organizing vote had pitted the Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA) against the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), and the Teamsters Union. Each contender had adherents on the Bridgewater campus, and some Bridgewater faculty had no wish to unionize at all. Each organization had qualities that appealed to some potential members. The MTA, with which MSCA would ultimately affiliate, represented hundreds of thousands of public school teachers in the kindergarten to twelfth grade sector. Its substantial political weight was attractive, but its K-12 worldview was worrisome. The AAUP understood college and university professors, but could it function in Massachusetts politics? For some members, the Teamster reputation for union toughness promised results.

Charlie’s task on campus: bring the membership together by providing initial leadership for an organization with the attributes of both a professional association and a union and provide assistance to members who needed it when they faced career-related problems. Chapter By-Laws needed to be devised and new governance system needed to be organized. Charlie’s second most important task – helping individual members is always first priority – was guaranteeing that the membership had a real voice in college governance, and that its professional expertise and judgments met respect. Charlie faced a difficult challenge off campus, too: collective bargaining was unknown territory, as was hammering out a workable affiliation with nine other institutions, some of them very different from our school. Members of the first state-wide MSCA Board of Directors remember well Charlie’s active participation in state-wide affairs. Charlie always had something to contribute to discussions and it was we who benefited from his compassionate leadership at Bridgewater State.

Jean Stonehouse is President of the Bridgewater Chapter of the Massachusetts State College Association and Professor of History.