

Reflections about the Class of 1971 and Our Years at Juniata College
An Interview with Dr. Thomas Woodrow

by Dehra Winters Shafer



It was a beautiful spring day for a ride to Homewood at Martinsburg PA to visit with Dr. Tom Woodrow and his wife Elouise. Dr. Woodrow was my Secondary Education Advisor and supervised my student teaching in biology. After reading Ted's interview with Mrs. Cherry, I decided to interview Tom, because he was a big influence on my decision to stay in education.

The "Science and Methods" course I took with Dr. Woodrow was my first methods class. I expected to learn what I needed to know to deliver content to high school students who probably knew little of textbook biology. Was I surprised! Dr. Woodrow introduced us to "discovery learning." He showed us the importance of structuring learning situations so that learning is personal, so that students discover

for themselves what they need to know. That methodology stuck with me into my future in adult education.

When I met with Tom, he told me one of my favorite anecdotes. When he was teaching biology at Juniata Valley HS, some of his classes included farm kids. So one Friday, he told them that on Monday they were going to do an experiment and that he needed someone's help. Would someone please bring in a bucket of silage? And on Monday morning he had not one bucket, but one bucket from almost every student—more than enough for the day's experiment! The topic was anaerobic metabolism, and the method for teaching the topic was to build a small still and decant about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup ethyl alcohol. The students thought it was really neat when they used the alcohol for sterilizing their equipment in their next experiment.

When I asked Dr. Woodrow what lessons he hoped his college students had learned, he mentioned four. The first was discipline. Of course he meant the importance of maintaining discipline in one's classroom, but he also meant the importance of self-discipline—to be organized, well-planned and have basic objectives for your students and your classes. The second was research-- to do the reading and research to prepare not only for the subject you

are teaching, but also for your own professional development. The third was respect for your students—for their personal backgrounds and home situations. Either could have impact on their academic performance. The fourth was to value the students as people—young people who might have problems—and recognize the importance of being available to listen to them should they seek you out.

Dr. Woodrow's personal story is one that makes you feel people do end up where they are supposed to be in life—even if some of the twists and turns seem more like coincidences than fate. He graduated from high school in Greensburg PA in 1950 and entered the US Air Force. From 1950 to 1954, he was a medic spending two of those years based in Anchorage, Alaska, and traveling as far afield as the Aleutian Islands. He said he knows he saw some of the most beautiful places on Earth.

When he got out of the service, Tom was faced with the decision of what to do next. He talked with his high school mentor, a Mr. Williams, who said, "You need to go to college." I think Dr. Woodrow protested that he wasn't college material. He admits he did not "apply himself" in high school, but Mr Williams persisted, "You have an excellent record from the Air Force," and, then and there with Tom in his office, he called a friend, Dean Mayes at Juniata College. Dr. Mayes agreed to accept Tom as a provisional student for one semester. Tom may have surprised himself, but I'll wager it was no surprise to Mr. Williams that he got 2 A's and 2 B's, and became a full-fledged student at Juniata College.

From 1954 to 1958, Dr. Woodrow was among 54 veterans on campus attending Juniata on the GI Bill of Rights. These students brought a unique perspective to campus. Some had fought in the Korean War. They had had "real life" experiences well beyond that of the traditional 17 to 21-year-old students. Hazing and curfews may have seemed silly to these veterans. Fortunately another kind of mentor entered the picture, Dr. Calvert Ellis, President of the College (also Betty Ann Cherry's father) who retired at the end of our freshman year. He understood and appreciated the fact that the vets were older with different life experiences from the typical freshmen.

In the spring of 1958, once again it was time to figure out what came next. One evening, Dr. Woodrow was at the American Legion and ran into the principal and the superintendent of the Juniata Valley School District. They both encouraged him to apply for the biology teacher opening. That's how he ended up teaching biology at the JVHS for nine years—and he loved it! So when Dr. Ellis called to recruit him to be a Secondary Education professor at JC, he turned him down. Dr. Ellis had to ask two more times before he said "yes." He made the move to Juniata College in the fall of 1967. Later he would earn a Master's degree from Indiana University of PA and a Doctorate from Penn State in 1976.

Dr. Woodrow made a notable contribution to the Juniata academic community when he said "yes" to Charlotte Houchin Kresge to bring the PA Science Olympiad to Juniata College. Charlotte was the State Director of the Pennsylvania Science Olympiad and liaison with the PA

Dept. of Education for this event. When the previous institution could no longer sponsor the Olympiad, Charlotte approached Tom. He said it was a “no brainer,” and for 15 years the college hosted the Olympiad—and for 15 years 1000 high school students visited the Juniata campus each year, and discovered that it was “a college that changed lives.”

Dr. Woodrow retired from Juniata in 1997. He received the Beachley Distinguished Academic Service Award in 1992. He was named Professor Emeritus in 1997.



In his retirement, he continues to be a lifelong learner himself. He has taken quilting classes, and created beautiful geometric designs like the one in the picture. He is also a master woodworker. He has made several pieces of furniture now a part of his own home. Perhaps the one he is most proud of is the grandfather's clock. (See picture.) Tom also enjoys the out-of-doors and is an avid fly fisherman.



Had you read this article to that young man just out of the Air Force in 1954, my guess is that he would have been hard-pressed to see the man he would become. Yet I realize that is likely true of all of us.

How many of us on graduation day in 1971 could have seen ourselves as the people we are today approaching our 50th reunion?