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BECOMING AN ENGLISH TEACHER WASN'T LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT FOR RON GREENE

JAMESTOWN – English classes were not “love at first sight” for Ron Greene when he was in high school.

Making a grade of C in senior English class kept him off the A honor roll. He preferred science classes, where he was a stellar student.

Yet, he spent 38 years teaching, the last 21 years at Guilford Technical Community College, and was acclaimed by his peers as an outstanding teacher of English literature and argument-based research. His retirement becomes official Aug. 1.

“I had no idea of becoming a teacher; I was a chemistry major at Carolina,” Greene said.

Greene was an inspiration to co-workers and students alike, said adjunct English instructor Lynn Salsi. “He was a master in explaining every single detail to students so they could grasp the material. He was careful to explain or lead a discussion on how each story, poem or epic was relevant to modern students,” Salsi said.

“I sat through most of his ancient literature classes....as a way of observing how he put together this class and also how he selected the literature that he taught,” Salsi said. “Ron elevated the manner of discourse in the classroom, giving the importance of studying literature and English 112 meaning to hundreds – more like thousands -- of students during his career,” she said.

Greene said simply, “I am not a scholar; I am a teacher and enjoyed reading a lot and researching for my Western World Lit classes.”

Instructor Golda Fried echoes Salsi’s acclaim for Greene’s teaching methods. “After Ron Greene became my mentor, my teaching immediately improved as he encouraged me to teach out of the textbook more.... He taught me to link ideas from one lecture to the next. He also stressed teaching students the importance of ‘purpose and audience’ in every composition class and to make sure students knew how to stay ‘on task’ and to grade them for being ‘on task.’ ”

Greene embraced English at UNC-Chapel Hill simply as a subject related to his ambition to become a technical writer. Becoming a teacher wasn’t in his vocational plan.

He left college after three years, and did a four-year hitch in the U.S. Navy, serving in Vietnam, the Mediterranean, the Apollo 12 launch and NATO forces. By the time he returned to the university where he graduated in 1971, Greene had a world of experience gained outside the classroom that helped him better understand the “reality of life.”

He said, "College is not some game; it is the practicing and learning of real life. I think this attitude is a carryover from my Navy days when what I learned and taught there were a serious matter of safety or harm even life or death.

"There is no dress rehearsal to life. But in school you are often given a second chance, which is a bit different from 'real life.' "

Greene's Vietnam experience – in between missions off the coast from the Red River and Hanoi -- also became a time spent with two paperback books of John Donne's poetry and "Meditations."

This was another small step toward Greene becoming immersed in literature.

It was natural for his spare time to be spent reading. "I have been addicted to reading since I was a small boy," Greene said.

He began hawking newspapers – and reading them too – at the age of six in Chicago, his hometown. The Chicago Sun Times was his daily treasure.

Living two blocks from the legendary Wrigley Field, home of the Cubs, is burned in his memory of best experiences.

That world was uprooted at age 11 when his family moved to Winston-Salem where his father worked for Western Electric.

With Reynolds High School and the Navy behind him, Greene graduated from UNC-Chapel Hill in 1971, and still wasn't decided on a career path.

Teaching was not in his plans. Until....

Greene was recommended for a teaching assistanceship position at Western Carolina University. "To get paid I had to teach," he said. "I got into teaching and I really liked it," he said. "Those were probably the two best years of my life," Greene said.

That's also where he met and married the former Linda Buckner of Mars Hill.

"We decided we would go to wherever either of us got the first job offer," Greene said.

Linda Greene got a teaching job in Statesville, and Ron Greene took a job as assistant director and vice-president of Statesville Business College. A year later he became dean at Biscayne Southern College in Concord.

Linda Greene enrolled at UNCG to work on a master's degree in business education. Ron Worked as a part-time teacher of English and other courses at Forsyth Tech.

That was followed by brief teaching stints at Winston-Salem State and UNCG before Greene landed a job teaching English at Elon College (now University). He describes his position at Elon as "four wonderful years."

Then Dr. JoAnn Buck of GTCC beckoned, wanting him to interview for a job there. "I had to 'mini-teach' for 20 minutes; then they asked me 'what did I want to teach?'

"I said 'students.' They thought I was being sarcastic but I wasn't. I wanted to teach students."

His 21-year career at GTCC was soon begun.

"I do not celebrate leaving GTCC. It was a wonderful and rewarding experience of a lifetime with truly great people from administration to staff to fantastic faculty," he said.

“I was really excited about being there during the years when so many great programs were developed, like the Faculty in Training program, Larry Gatlin School of Entertainment Technology, the athletic program and culinary arts,” Greene said.

And, yes, he loved teaching *students*.

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Greene's GTCC honors

- Nine appreciation awards
- Three Student Government Association appreciation awards
- Three Who's Who Among American Teachers awards
- Nominated 20 times for excellence in teaching during 21 years at GTCC