

Calling an audible

When college football fell through, an undergraduate's backup plan came from hidden talents that would take him away from Glassboro as a student and bring him back to teach. If only he'd had an iPhone to capture the polka.

Professor emeritus William Kushner earned his Ph.D. in rhetoric and public address from Indiana University. As a high school teacher, he was named Outstanding Young Educator by the New Jersey Chamber of Commerce in 1967. At Glassboro State College, he established the required course in public speaking for all undergraduates and played eight roles on the Glassboro/Rowan stage opposite students. A professor of communication studies, he also served as chair for the Department of Speech/Theatre/Dance.

Kushner still avidly follows Rowan Athletics teams and stays up into the wee hours for live coverage because of the time difference from his home in Israel.

In 1950 I was a freshman and the youngest starting player on the Glassboro football team. Somehow, the College managed to put together the team with a handful of GIs returning from World War II.

In the fall of my sophomore year, I was elected vice president of the Men's Athletic Association. A week later, Director of Physical Education Roland Esbjornson announced that due to the Korean War, the fledgling football program would be cancelled.

The Whit published a picture of me confronting the director with a petition signed by students requesting the reinstatement of football. Our petition failed.

With football cancelled, the future looked bleak. Everyone at the College enrolled in one education program or another; all destined to teach. However, I also had dreamed of becoming a football coach.

During that semester, one class piqued my interest: Miss Elizabeth Tohill's speech class. Apparently seeing some potential in me, Miss Tohill cast me in two one-act plays.

I can visualize the moment when I sat opposite Miss Elizabeth Tohill after a class as she said, "Bill, you are talented. Unfortunately, we do not have a major in speech and theatre, but Montclair State College started one. I believe you should transfer. I

know the chairman. Let me give him a call. And, oh," she said with a smile, "they still have a football team."

That call changed my life. For a number of reasons, I never again played football. However, thanks to Miss Elizabeth Tohill, I left Glassboro and eventually came back to teach for 29 wonderful years.

But I'm getting ahead of the rest of the story: Before I took Miss Tohill's advice in 1952, it was time for the annual Sophomore Dance during the spring. Miss Evelyn Reed was the class advisor and the dean of women. Members of the sophomore class thought it would be appropriate if Dean Reed had an escort for the dance. For reasons that I cannot recall, I was chosen to be Dean Reed's escort.

The class bought a corsage, arranged for a ride and even took us to an ice cream parlor in Collingswood after the dance. Much to everyone's surprise, Dean Evelyn Reed was an excellent dancer. We did a foxtrot, moved to a Lindy Hop and stepped into a polka. A former physical education instructor, she made me look good on the dance floor. Much to my surprise, we were the hit of the evening. I regret that we didn't have iPhones in 1952.

Afterward, I walked Dean Reed back to Oak Hall. A number of my classmates, so I was told, waited to see if I would kiss the dean good night. I was not so bold.

By fall, I was on my way to earn a bachelor's degree in speech and theatre and 20 years later, my teaching experience and a Ph.D. qualified me to return to Glassboro as a faculty member.

By then, Dean Reed had retired, but lived nearby. My classmates had talked about that Sophomore Dance for years. I called Dean Reed. We reminisced, we laughed, but I didn't get to visit her before she passed away.

I was among a few former students to return to join the faculty. It was possible for me because Miss Tohill set the standard for all of us in education: "Your duty as a teacher is not to lecture, but to assist each of your students to achieve his or her potential."

Miss Elizabeth Tohill was also gone when I returned in 1970. But I walked into the dark auditorium now named for her. The only illumination came from the red exit signs. I stood at the back and whispered, "Thank you, Elizabeth Tohill." ■



Wearing #34 in second row, middle, Kushner helped his team tally a 4-2 season before the Korean War suspended college football at Glassboro.