

Larry the Legend: A Profile of Larry Laraby

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One of my first postings was at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. The school had been opened as one of the first “environmental universities” in an “arboretum” in a town that made a lot of toilet paper.

One of the first folk I met in Green Bay was a guy who came to be known as “Larry the Legend.”



Larry entered UWGB in 1968. Twenty-seven years later, when I arrived, he was still trying to get his degree. Every time he got close to graduating, they'd pull the rug out from under him by changing the graduation requirements.

In class, Larry was brilliant. When he spoke, all those assembled hung on his every word. He'd evidently put some of all those years of working other jobs and rambling around to good use.

As his professor, I also began to count myself as one of *his* students. I frequently sought his advice about things. Years later, I even consulted him when I became an education department chair at the University of Alaska Anchorage.

Larry is one of a few folks I know who seems to have been everywhere before I got there. When I mention I've done time in Green Bay, folks often say, "Oh, you must know Larry Laraby." When I mention Anchorage, it's the same deal. Larry was up to good there, too.

Larry was one of the students I referred to as my '27 Yankees. It was an English Education class, and I swear every student in that class was a genius of one sort or another. I used to sit in the back of the class watching their practice lessons and think, *They all can't be A students. There's got to be a B in there somewhere...* But there wasn't a B in the bunch. They've all gone on to bigger and better things, and whenever I meet someone who knows one of them, he or she is referred to as some kind of master educator. Some of them have even gone on to become department chairs and administrators.

And the worst part of it is, I knew each one was already great when they first entered my classroom. They all would have been successful without me.

I helped Larry challenge some courses and wrote some letters to get him credit for some of the courses he'd taken over those twenty-seven years.

When I left UWGB, they threw me a freakin' sheet cake party. They asked me what my greatest accomplishment was while I was at GB. I told them, "Getting Larry the Legend out of here."

Larry went on to become chair of the English department at Green Bay's legendary Notre Dame High School, and later to teach in the Green Bay public school system where he pioneered an alternative education program for students experiencing difficulties.



Two years ago, Larry received Green Bay's highest teaching award.

The social media tributes from his students began rolling in, and I continue to read them on Facebook.

Larry retired last year. Folks begged him not to leave. He said he knew it was time.

My father often said one of the saddest things is when you outlive your kids. I feel something similar when one of my students exits early.

Larry recently announced he has cancer. The prognosis is not good.

When I heard, I cursed the inflexible bureaucrats — the kind, former Buffalo Bills coach Marv Levy famously called “over-officious jerks,” — the kind who kept Larry out of the classroom all those years.