

GRCC

*Special Tribute to
Dr. Marinus Swets*

January 2009

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RETIREES' *Quarterly*



Dr. Marinus Swets
September 4, 1926–December 17, 2008



We Honor Dr. Marinus Swets, Our Colleague, Leader and Friend.

*The following stories and tributes were written by GRCC retirees,
family, friends, colleagues and former students prior to and after the passing of
Dr. Swets in remembrance of our friend and colleague.*

*The family requests that instead of flowers, donations are to be made to the
Marinus Swets Scholarship Fund at GRCC. Donations may be mailed to:*

*Marinus Swets Scholarship Fund
GRCC Foundation
143 Bostwick Avenue, NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49503*

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In my early years at the college, when I didn't know Marinus very well, I was amazed to learn that he often walked to school from his home in East Grand Rapids, which must be several miles away. At the time, I thought that was a bit eccentric. As I say, this was when I was just learning of other unconventional things he did--and said. But what impressed me was the fact that he'd memorize poetry on his way to the college. When I was in high school, we were required to learn a certain number of lines we had to recite before the class. Some of the poems were out of my mind the minute I pronounced the last word. But Marinus kept a lot of poetry stashed in his remarkable memory. And then he'd spout a few lines at really appropriate times. That really amazed me.

Helen Beuker

As a relative newcomer to GRCC, I have not had the history with Marinus that so many others have, and I must admit that I'm a bit envious of those who worked with him. Over the past three years I have heard many stories about him, many from his longtime friend Keith Longberg, but from many others as well. His commitment to students, especially those who found academic success at GRCC, gives testimony to who we are as a college.

I'm touched by his desire to see others try new and exciting things. Through the Van & Marinus Swets Travel Award, the GRCC community (faculty, staff, and students) has explored the marvels of this incredible world we live in. Marinus told me on several occasions, award these funds to the craziest ideas (although he was a bit more colorful in how he described the "craziest" ideas).

GRCC's future owes much gratitude to Dr. Marinus Swets.

Andy Bowne, Ed.D.
Associate Vice President for
College Advancement

At one of the faculty picnics, I brought along a barbershop quartet. I sang lead. We sang, “There’s a Tree in the Meadow.” One phrase says, “But further on down lovers’ lane a silhouette I see. I know you’re kissing someone else, I wish that it were me.” In introducing the song, I mentioned to the group that a phrase was not correct in its grammar. I also mentioned that Dr. Swets would be sure to notice that, and that we made a change. Then, as we sang that phrase, we sang “But further on down lovers’ lane a silhouette I spy. I know you’re kissing someone else, I wish that it were I.”

Chuck Buffham

I got my first impression of Marinus when he showed up late for his scheduled interview with our committee to select the person to fill the position of Dean of Arts and Science. He immediately started bantering with us as he was undoing the rubber band and rolling down his pants legs from his bike ride from home to campus for the interview. It was one of the best and most fascinating interviews I ever had. He took us on a wonderful and wild ride as we quickly discovered his wit, depth, and devotion to GRJC. He never hesitated to tell me what he thought, why he thought it, and what the consequences of his suggestions or actions might be.

He gave his heart and soul to his college, his students and his colleagues, and he would drop absolutely anything to help a student. He has a great sense of humor and zest for life, and is a strong advocate for his people and their needs. Marinus is one of a kind, and deeply loved and appreciated by all of us who had the privilege to know and work with him.

Dick Calkins

“Well, whatdya wanna do? Teach fifteen hours a week or thirty?” So began my interview for a teaching position at GRJC with the man who would become my new Boss soon. He meant, of course, fifteen hours a week in the classroom. He wasn’t including the rest of the job’s duties such as grading those required weekly compositions, the office hours, the departmental/divisional meetings and the total college get-togethers. But it didn’t matter. His confidence and total demeanor had me hooked from the start. Doc Swets didn’t know much about me when he interviewed me for a full-time position in the Language Arts Department, but he sure was convincing. And so began my thirty years at the College, and I never regretted one day of it.

Doc Swets became my mentor and role model. I admired his leadership, his knowledge, his compassion, his frankness, and his common sense. I listened to everything he told me, tried to emulate his compassion behind his apparent gruffness, admired his leadership and his ability to “keep the lid on” the extraordinary faculty he led throughout some challenging times. And I followed in his footsteps—departmental chair, divisional chair, and eventually one of several Deans as the college metamorphosed from GRJC into then now prestigious GRCC. HE was an incomparable mentor, guide, and leader, and I learned much from him by watching, listening, and following his advice. He was always the consummate leader.

Much of what I accomplished in my own teaching career, I owe to this extraordinary man. As I followed him “up the ladder” so to speak, I tried to emulate his leadership, decisiveness and compassion. And above all of that, he has remained a friend and colleague. I’m very lucky to have known him and to have opted for that “fifteen hours” that turned into so much more for me personally than the “30 hours” I’d been spending in the classroom. I consider Doc Swets much more a mentor than a Boss.

Charles Chamberlain

Dr. Swets: As I think about my early years at GRJC (1965 – 1990) I remember sitting in your office on many occasions. I had not been requested to come in but I had concerns about students. I would ask your advice about certain students’ needs and would listen for your response. Very articulately you would go on and on about Macbeth or Romeo & Juliet or King Lear. I didn’t have any of those people in my

class, but I listened anyway. You told me it was poetry but I couldn't figure out what rhymed with what. When my eyes would start to glaze over, you would give me an answer to take care of my concerns regarding the students I had mentioned. You would tell me to go see (insert name here) and tell them you said they would handle it. You would always seem to be harsh, abrupt and uncaring. BUT you were one of the warmest, friendliest, most helpful people I ever met at the college. Thank you for helping me help students.

David Clark

Rara avis! One of a kind! *Sui generis!* How many words are there to describe Marinus? Inquisitive! Thoughtful! Curious! Unpredictable!

One time he'll come in and throw out a strange word, then discourse on its definition and etymology. Another time he'll recite stanzas from some obscure poet or regale us with tales of growing up Dutch in Grand Rapids.

You never know just what to expect, but you can always count on enjoying a conversation with Marinus Swets.

Bernie DePrimo

If you do an Internet search of the history of names, "Marinus" is sometimes described as a very rare male first name. What an appropriate description of the Marinus we know, for he is certainly a very rare individual indeed. When thinking of other words that describe Marinus, the following come to mind: unique, humorous, curious, and direct. He is also known as an historian, a teacher, and a storyteller. He may be slim in stature but is certainly broad in intellect.

Although all of the above could stand embellishment and elaboration, "storyteller" stands out for me. Among other things, Marinus could tell you the saga of former students, how to recap a tire, and he could recount the response of acquaintances from his past, when, after many years, he would seek them out and, in his own direct way, would confront them and ask, "Do you remember me?"

He could tell you about his youth and all the successful individuals who grew up on Leonard Street. Mention "Bochem" or "Elve" and off he would go with some fascinating tid-bit. I do not know Marinus as well, nor am I as close to him, as many of you are; however our encounters have always been friendly, usually uplifting, often inspiring, and a learning experience. What more could you desire? Thank you, Marinus!

Tom Deschaine

Marinus, to me, is a man whose character has many facets. Relating to his time as dean, I found him intimidating at times. But underneath was a very kind and caring heart with a goal of helping people.

I came to have a new respect for his knowledge and wisdom when we worked together on a special project. Our goal was to establish a MACRO agreement for our nursing students transferring to Grand Valley. The bottom line was that instead of applying to GVSU they applied directly to the School of Nursing. Other modifications in the grade point differences made it a level playing field for both GVSU and GRCC applicants. This agreement is still in effect.

But the final signing agreement meeting had an example of Marinus' impulsive character. He decided that he didn't like the long-sleeved shirt he wore, so he just chopped off the sleeve in the office and into the meeting we went. The meeting room was very hot, but Marinus had no choice but to keep his suit coat on. Back in his office he had some choice words to say. GRCC is a better institution because of the contributions of Dr. Swets.

Roger DeVries

So much has been written lovingly about Marinus Swets the man, and the man of the college he loved, but so little of his first and greatest love, Marinus the Teacher. I was privileged to experience the power of his guiding intellect in my first college English class in 1961. It was an honors class carefully selected

by invitation to include some of the brightest high school students to enroll that year at Junior College. How and why I was invited is beyond me, but it was my good fortune to discover through this man the challenge of words seeking worlds of expression in a new universe called college. We traveled through a text that presented William Stace's "Man against Darkness" juxtaposed with C. S. Lewis' "The Efficacy of Prayer" with Marinus carefully guiding us through the power of these giant intellects. We learned that thoughts really mattered, that there were higher minds that had mastered the discipline of the essay and expression of words to extend our understanding of the possibilities in what otherwise might seem a bleak and barren universe. We were spellbound, and I am not sure even Marinus fully understood the power of the journey he had begun with us.

The exploration continued into the second semester, now a world of poetry and short story. One spring day he came into class and just talked quietly for fifty minutes about his youth and growing up on the west side of Grand Rapids, but mostly of his father. And of that he dwelt on his father's long convalescence before his death, of the bed sores, of the quiet desperation and humility of a man slowly slipping away from a son who loved him deeply. We were all in tears by the end of the hour and left the class quietly as if exiting a church after a funeral.

Two years later Swets visited Western Michigan where I and many others from that class had transferred. It was a follow-up conference that GRJC had always done with its students. Swets was genuinely surprised and I am sure pleased to discover that nine of his former students from that class were majoring in English and had taken up secondary education as their life's profession. I was fortunate to be hired by him in my first year teaching at South High to work with developmental students at Creston High in a night school program. The "master" was directing this experimental program and I got to be a disciple of his. He challenged us to teach just as he had challenged us to learn in the classroom. In all the years I knew Marinus the Department Head and Dean of Arts at the college, I also was aware of the power he held over students as a masterful teacher. I think of him now and without apology harken back to a poem I discovered that spring semester by Dylan Thomas: "Oh my father on that sad height,/ Do not go gently into that dark night,/ Rage! Rage against the dying of the light!"

I knew Marinus was failing badly when he joined us one last time at our monthly Golden Raiders breakfast. I am glad he did not have to suffer long, like his father, but could still maintain his dignity and intellect in the face of his own death. Long may he be remembered and honored for all of his contributions to the life of the college and the students he loved and guided like a father. I know for sure if he were alive he would take this remembrance apart phrase by phrase and extract every bonehead phrase, cliché, and sentimental word. And I truly wish he could be here to do that.

Mike Franz

I have a favorite word that characterizes some of my experiences in life. The word is SERENDIPITOUS. Such was the occasion when I first met Dr. Marinus Swets in April 1988 on behalf of my stepdaughter Gail, who was at the time a student at GRJC. She had missed the last two weeks of the Winter semester due to illness and could not get her grades. She had asked me if I could intervene and see if I could have the issue straightened out.

Advising Dr. Swets of the situation, he quickly rectified the problem and I thanked him and was on my way out when he asked me some questions about myself. With my responses and a succession of many other questions, Dr. Swets extended the visit to another hour and half. He finally popped the question which I surmise was the reason for the many preceding ones. He asked me if I'd be interested in teaching at GRJC, and to my surprise I enquired as to what he thought I would be able to teach. He said we could always use English teachers, and said he'd keep me in mind.

In September 1988 I was contemplating some career changes after having been in the pastoral ministry and in medical practice. I called Dr. Swets to see if his interest in my teaching at the school was still on his mind. He was pleased to hear from me and asked me to come down to the college. At the time I was a

pastor in a small church in Cedar Springs. Upon seeing him he said that he needed an English teacher for an EN101 class that was already in progress, given that it was the tenth day of classes, and that I was to go see Mr. Chuck Chamberlain for further instructions. I went to see Chuck and he handed me a class list of 33 students, a textbook, a syllabus, and a room number on the first floor Main building, and the rest is history.

This being my 21st year at the college, I cannot begin to express my deepest appreciation for what that visit so long ago has meant to me, and I have repeatedly expressed my gratitude to Marinus. I even had the privilege of painting his portrait as a small way of thanking him. How deeply fortunate has my life been because of having known this gentleman.

Roland Gani

Marinus "Slim" Swets came to Junior College shortly after my arrival in 1960. I can only hope that my influence on the academic life of the institution has been even half as impressive as his during our thirty some years there.

I consider him to be the epitome of reliability, intellectuality and friendliness. In addition to these serious qualities, he often used self-deprecating humor; i.e., "I had a brain scan yesterday and as usual, they found nothing."

In a separate category, he has been an exemplary parent (with help from Van) as evidenced by his three delightful children, whom I know both socially and academically.

Alan Gerrard

I'm not sure exactly what makes a person "great." I know it is not the social standing of the person. Nor is it his or her accomplishments. It's not even the number of friends who admire that person. But here is an example of my criteria: This took place when "Slim" Swets was Dean of Arts and Sciences at GRJC. It illustrates some qualities which I would list under "greatness."

A recently-hired administrator apparently was given the task of developing and distributing the rules regarding faculty and student behavior during a "Fire-Drill." The neat and lengthy document was distributed to the faculty. We instructors were to appoint a leader from the class and march the class into the hall - single file and orderly. We were to lead this group down the steps in the North building and then cross the street with the group intact. Then we were to take roll to see that all were present. After the "all-clear" was sounded, we were to reverse the procedure. If you ever experienced a fire drill from the North building you know that the stairs were jammed with people, students (wisely) did not stay with any class, and, finally, when reaching the outside, a large percentage of students (and some faculty) would disappear. The rule obviously demanded a totally ridiculous, unworkable procedure.

A couple of us faculty members went down to see Dr. Swets with a copy of the procedure in hand. He read it and then reached into his desk for a rubber stamp. He stamped the letter several times and put it in an envelope. Whether it was sent to the author, I don't know. Propriety keeps me from stating the message on the rubber stamp, but it had something to do with "male bovine droppings". Within a day or two we received a notice that the document had been rescinded. It's possible that some of these details were forgotten (or embellished), but it is an example of several of Marinus' traits as a great person. Honesty is one! Problems are faced regardless of their origin. Truth is always told. A great person is also "other-centered" (as opposed to "self-centered). Marinus has always shown that quality. In closing, "A great person acts justly, loves mercy, and walks humbly with his God. (Micah 6: 8)." Thanks, Marinus, for what you have been, for what you are!

Al Heldt

Years ago I was sitting in the West Building teacher's lounge complaining about my job, about being over educated and underpaid, when Marinus walked in, overheard me, and asked, "Why don't you just quit then?" It shocked me, and I never complained about that or any other job since then.

Dave Holkeboer

At the time, the Collegiate Office was in the “West Building,” which is now the location of Kendall College. In the back of the office, only slightly partitioned from the student newspaper’s work area, sat two of the teachers who influenced my future the most. On one side sat “Doc” Swets with his long frame slung in a desk chair - next to him was an old phonograph on which he frequently listened to recordings of quirky songs from decades gone by. The other side was Walt Lockwood’s niche. Besides sharing the small space all day, they walked to work together daily, a time when they sparked each others’ thoughts or just soaked up their companionship in silence.

Those of us who were also in the office - doing Collegiate tasks, working on Display magazine, or keeping the chairs warm at the perpetual card game - had the privilege of eavesdropping on the conversations between these two creative forces who rarely dipped a toe into the mainstream.

Looking back, I’m sure that some of those conversations were meant to be overheard, to get us unsuspecting idealists to percolate a bit over topics that we might have dozed through in a traditional class lecture, to foment a little revolutionary thought.

Doc, never one to stand on ceremony – or rules - would toss a remark to whomever was in the room and I have a distinct memory of him - leaning back in his chair, head tilted, smiling just a little - as one of us took a shot at sounding as worldly and knowledgeable as he. I know I liked to act a little more outlandishly, to opine a little more loudly in the hope of earning a sign of approval. I wonder if we amused him with our wobbly, newfound attitudes and insights on the world. But I don’t think so. I think he cultivated them. And during all this, he and Walt refined my love of writing and gently guided my understanding of the craft by introducing me to writers who are masters. What I learned in that cozy little office has woven through all the work I’ve ever done. Just like the memory of that lanky, friendly, wise teacher by the old phonograph.

Vicki Hudson
Associate Director, Communications

There is only one Dr. Swets. There will be no one like him. Alice Beckwith and I went to see him about two weeks before his death. He was telling us many-many stories with the colorful language only a Dr. Swets can get by with. His presence will always be with us.

Julie Johnson

Impressions of Marinus Swets: Stops for high school hitchhiker on Jefferson and Wealthy in ’53 red and white Buick, unpainted steel patches hiding rust holes. Drops me off at his house on Burton St. (I lived a few blocks from there.) Remembered me a year later in his GRCC class. Criticized the length of my Faulknerian sentences. Tough critic, just grader. Remembered me several years later when I applied to teach there. Remembered a million things: poetry, people, events, details, details. Crazy about his wife Van, his three kids. Hard-boiled egg for lunch. Tolerant: watched quizzically as three of my students destroyed heavy wood furniture in the West Bldg. lot, outside his journalism room. Shook his head in wonderment. Didn’t fire me. Allowed me to experiment. Cryptic wit, moody at times, terse, curt, direct: “You smoke in class?” “Yes.” “Don’t.” “Okay.” Generous host, great conference companion, disdainer of romantics: “You like Herman Hesse, don’t you.” (Declarative, like an accusation.) “Yes.” “He’s a *** romantic, isn’t he.” A great exploiter of talent: “You want to teach Humanities 270?” “Geez, do you think . . . ? “You’ll be good.” “You ought to teach journalism.” “Me? Do you think . . . ? “I think you’ll do a good job.” “I’d like you to teach philosophy.” “Um, do you think I can do. . . ? “You’ll do a good job.” Loved to challenge, provoke, generate dialogue. Long stride, purposeful, big hands, splayed fingertips – they spoke somehow. Shaggy dog story from Zeeland to Benton Harbor. Overloader of classes as Dean. Always fair to students, faculty. Gruff. Kind. Heard sounds no one else could hear until he recited the stanzas, hummed the oratorio or the ditty. Always sounds, images in that head. Produced college catalogues as easily as memos, always first-rate. “Hopes dance best on bald men’s heads. A tall, angular poet, fisherman, teacher, lover of living, grasper of life, scholar, imbiber, trickster, repairer of cars, family man, friend, genius. Whew.

Philip Jung

The Poem You Have Become

for Marinus Swets

With trembling care, knowing that most things break

— E.A. Robinson

I am sorry, you said
that I am bitching about my life
I'm afraid I'm giving in
to anomie
do you know what that is

It is all things not learned from you,
whose hands moved like a magician's
brought color to language,
language to life,
life to life worth living

From the simplest of places
of those who dared not
consider evil, who would not
suffer the smallest indignity
an anarchy you polished
raised to genius

Do you know what that is
you sit erect, eyes forward
taking in the road that did not exist
confronted by endless streams of traffic,
of people heading to places you no longer need to be,
reliving everything
when everything was worth living

I'm giving in, you said,
these many years telling the story
of your becoming
without great embellishment
yet fresh detail
a song in Dutch,
a fragment of a poem,
a moment too close,
erased with a smile, a soft dismissal
have I told you this

It comes down to the very least
of what you remember
of knowing that most things break
of understanding that we all must live with trembling care
or we do not live at all.

GF Korreck

Student of Marinus Swets, from 1968-70

Marinus

You were as big as any man.
Rooms grew small when you came in
And forced us to the walls, then drew us
back again.
Women watched with curious eyes
a man bigger than their own,
and we drank and grew bolder,
echoing your tone.

Now we visit the narrow bed
from which a woman lifts you, sick,
your voice, thin, slurred, remembers
Yeats' "a tattered coat upon a stick."
Nurses turn now with curious eyes--
to the courtyard, a man mowing, shirt slung in a tree.
We sit with you enduring
Invisibility.

For nothing much is left, it seems,
but dying's leap.
It all comes down to
ruthless, inevitable sleep.
But at times we see your eyes catch flecks of light,
From your throat rasps the hum
of some old song. We wonder: could this be your
casting off, your sailing to Byzantium?

You said your stone should read
"I want some more."
Is it a song you hear
as you tack near to the holy shore?
Is it curious mermaids singing just to you?
There is something in the tunnel of your sight...
Is it golden, are you diving in the sea?
Is it sunrise before you now and not the night?

Walt Lockwood

Marinus loomed large in the lives of many people, mine for sure. I have always felt honored to know him and count him as a personal friend. He has had a strong presence and personality, but as I write this he's weakened and hospitalized, but still quoting poetry and retelling unlikely stories. Recently when I visited, he named a catalog of CC faculty he had hired as Division Chair or Dean and gave short evaluations of each and then summarized...“a *really* good bunch of people!” he said. He was right. It was a varied collection of individuals who didn't fit any one mold, but Marinus allowed us, encouraged us, to be individuals. We all had respect for, and trust in, Marinus, and therefore for each other. A unique congeniality and camaraderie of friendship, sharing, and mutual respect resulted. He was honest and if you asked a question, or offered a suggestion, you knew you'd get a response quickly. Sometimes when I sent him a note, he'd be sitting on the floor outside my office door when I arrived at school the next morning to respond personally. We always knew where we stood.

Marinus was one of the most capable and productive people I have ever known, and he probably knows more about the operation of the college and its history than anyone. Nobody has a stronger spine either. He was never intimidated, but would bend, or even break, any rule if it would help a student or a member of the faculty. (By some obscure magic, he could make it right.) He had a gift for recognizing potential in the most unlikely individuals, including me, and helping to grow that potential in an unobtrusive way. The force of his personality, intelligence, and caring changed the lives of countless people who have, in turn, passed on what they have gained or learned from him. If you have been fortunate enough to know Marinus Swets, you can never forget him. Neither can you deny or discard his exemplary influence on your work or on your life.

Keith Longberg

I really got to know Marinus after joining the JC staff in 1982. My first exposure to this unique individual and his sense of humor was at executive staff meetings. It became apparent to me that Marinus was not a fan of long drawn out meetings where nothing much seemed to be accomplished. During the meetings, Marinus busily jotted down notes, which I mistakenly thought were pertinent points about the subjects being discussed. Not so. Marinus would take words or phrases used during the discussions and manipulate them around into the most uproariously funny comments; sometimes a little off color, but always worth a laugh. Well, maybe not a laugh, after all, one had to maintain the proper decorum at staff meetings. Needless to say, I always tried to find a seat next to Marinus.

My last two meetings with Marinus were of a much more serious nature. On two consecutive Wednesdays I visited Marinus at the Porter Hills nursing facility. I was a somewhat ambivalent and a little apprehensive about the visit. I had been warned that his physical health had deteriorated and I could not help but wonder about his mental state. I need not have worried. His mind was as sharp as ever. We had a very pleasant 15 minutes reminiscing, as we older folks are prone to do. I reminded Marinus that my grandmother lived not far from the Swets' home, and as a young lad, I had spent many a summer day roaming along Cold Brook Creek, a wooded, undeveloped area Marinus referred to as Ferris Woods. He informed me that the big house overlooking the woods was a house of ill repute. Something I was completely unaware of as a youngster. Marinus was always quite the historian, although I doubt that tidbit of information would ever make it into the history of Grand Rapids. We also talked about people we both knew from his old neighborhood. That included the King family. Jack King was one of my favorite Central High teachers, and his brother, “Toughy,” was a close friend of my youngest uncle. Small world, isn't it. Marinus was also very familiar with my old neighborhood, the Coit School-Belknap area. It seemed that he attended a private elementary school on Hastings Street near the old Division Avenue. He walked through my neighborhood every school day, a round trip of at least three miles. I believe that must have been the beginning of his walking habit as he continued to walk to school regularly from his home to Junior College—a trek of at least four miles round trip. We spent another five minutes reminiscing about the hill neighborhood “kids” we knew and, as usual, Marinus added some very amusing tidbits. I left with the feeling that the visit was good for both of us.

On the Tuesday prior to my last visit with Marinus, I dropped by Carol Rosendall's house, a Central High classmate, to deliver a deposit check for a hall for our upcoming reunion. In our reminiscing, Jack King's name came up. Carol's husband, Jim a Creston grad, mentioned that he grew up in that neighborhood and knew the Kings. I asked him if he knew the Swets' family. He responded that his older brother, now 82, used to walk all the way across town to a private elementary school on Hastings Street with one of the Swets boys. That had to be Marinus. The age fit. Jim wondered if Marinus would remember John Rosendall and asked me to mention John the next time I saw Marinus. I thought what a timely coincidence it was.

I saw Marinus the next day. His physical condition had deteriorated considerably. He could hardly keep his eyes open, but his mind was alert. I let him know how amazed I was at how many people knew him, and then I asked him if he remembered John Rosendall. He nodded in the affirmative, smiled faintly and said in a hardly audible voice, "Yes, yes, a good man, good friend, good times." I decided not to linger as I could see that he was very tired and needed to rest. As I got up to leave, I shook his hand. He responded with a slight squeeze and mumbled, "Thank you, thank you." My immediate response was, Oh no, Marinus, let me give you a huge thanks from me and those hundreds of students, colleagues, friends, and loved ones whose lives you have impacted in such a positive way. As I left, I could not help to think, What a completely unique individual—a man with a brilliant mind and a warm heart—a truly remarkable man.

Earl Mandeville

I wasn't there long before he retired. He was always available, would always listen to and was always fair with the staff. He was a great advocate for the students. His sense of humor was wonderful and I enjoyed working with him. He was surely missed when left GRCC.

Barbara McCarty

One could write about the hand stamp Slim had made to respond to trash mail, but that is best discussed one on one. In days of old a considerable amount of oil money was made available to send Mid East young men to the USA for a college education. It was decided it would be best if they started in a community college. GRCC received a number of these Mid East students. A female JC staff member was assigned as the young Muslim Men's counselor. Needless to say, it did not work. Slim and Stew Myers were asked if they would take over the chaos. They agreed. There is an advantage when young teachers are tall and in good shape.

Special attention was given to classes such as a special drafting class. This was so they could acclimate to the engineering mode of communication. The school year then progressed in a normal fashion, except for Gaddafi's young men. Part of a Michigan indoctrination occurred when Slim and Stew took a number of the young men on an excursion to Pettibone Lake in Newaygo County. The counselors smiled as they watched the joy expressed by the Muslim young men as they ate their grilled venison hamburgs with a touch of pork added...later waded in a fresh water lake...and then prayed to Allah on a raised portion above the cottage patio. Slim did not tell them they had their prayer rugs aimed in the wrong direction.

Stew Meyers

When I think of Marinus, and I seem to be thinking about him quite a lot since I have been back at the college, I almost always reflect on his ability to create a story about almost anything. At the Deans' meetings, Marinus always took the notes, his way of creating the "history" of the institution according to him, I think. He would sit at the end of the table, sometimes seemingly preoccupied with what was going on and sometimes actively engaged in the conversation. Whatever was said, he supposedly put the comments down on paper for us to review at the next meeting. Need I say more!

The next meeting, he would pass out the minutes and most of us would simply stare at the minutes.

Any resemblance to whatever had been said was purely coincidental. It was Marinus' story, his spin on reality. Sometimes I would say, "This isn't what I said." To which he would usually just smile or deflect my words with a simple wave of his pen. In the long run, I knew it didn't matter what I had said. Marinus would give it meaning. I could live with the contradiction. I never completely adjusted, but I came to know that ultimately we do create our own reality. We are our own meaning makers.

I am grateful to him for that lesson. We are our own meaning makers. I have wondered what it would be like to sit with him here at the college . . . now . . . to let him create a scenario, to let him make new meaning. I know his "minutes" would always hold an element of surprise, an observation about the absurd, a belief in the importance of learning, a sense of purpose in what we do, a whimsical sense of adventure, and a joy in the doing. All said and done, he helped me define a new reality. For that I am eternally grateful.

Anne Mulder

"Do you realize the power you would have?" was one of the final questions that Dr. Swets asked me as he raised his arms out as far as he could as we stood in his office. My reply was, "No. If it is power, I'm not the right person for the job. It must be responsibility," I replied. And so ended my interview for the position of secretary to the Dean of Arts and Sciences. That began our "teamwork" for the next twelve years as I observed this tall, slim giant. The first year I was awestruck as I observed him in many facets dealing with student requests from overloaded classes, administrative duties, yet daily taking time out to seek out individuals who might need a word of encouragement. Our responsibilities were varied, yet we both enjoyed the challenge.

After a few days on the job with Dr. Swets, I was feeling very inferior when he stood towering over me as I sat at the typewriter. He pointed his finger at me and said, "You may be my secretary and I may be your boss, but never forget this, we are a team." From that moment on my fears were dispelled and we were partners.

Early one morning at work I glanced at the clock and saw a picture of Dr. Swets with his half-glasses, with his head cocked to the side, with a somewhat scornful look on his face on the number 5 of the clock. He had to have jumped onto the table under the clock and reached up to tape his picture on the 5. One never knew what to expect, but one thing was for sure: if a student came into the office with a problem, Dr. Swets was there to help. Occasionally we would have a frustrated female student come in crying and he would quickly turn her over to me.

After about 4 months of work with Dr. Swets, I came into work on a Monday morning and said, "Weatherwise, wasn't it a beautiful weekend?" "No such word as weatherwise." And he rambled on with the rule to substantiate it. Well, shut my mouth, I thought. It took quite a spell for me to feel comfortable to talk freely to him. But he allowed me extend my wings and gave me opportunities to be creative and to grow on the job. In other words, he trusted me. If anyone treated me with the slightest degree of disrespect, Dr. Swets took him or her to task. One day after lunch he came back and showed me a pair of shiny black shoes that he had just bought. Looking down at them I could see a big "X" cut on the shoe top. As he put it, "now the shoes fit." His arthritic feet just weren't comfortable unless he slit the tops of the shoes.

Yet those same arthritic feet walked many miles every day to work. In the cold winter he would wear a huge fur coat to keep warm while the barking dogs must have imagined him to be some big animal walking by. One cold morning he entered with the fur coat, warm gloves, and covered with snow. An administrator followed as Dr. Swets grabbed a Kleenex and wiped his bearded face and cold glassy eyes. Walking over to Dr. Swets the administrator asked, "What's wrong?" "I got the elevens," he replied. The administrator stood there baffled and said, "You what?" Dr. Swets pointed to his nostrils with his index and middle finger and said, "I got the elevens. Haven't you ever heard of the elevens?"

I don't think a day went by without hearing Dr. Swets reciting some poetry in the office. He dearly loved poetry. After quoting stanzas of poetry he would then explain it to all of us nearby. One day a poetry instructor invited him to come visit her poetry class. He couldn't wait to visit the class. I observed him briefly as he talked with the class and gave examples of poetry. This was his true love -- teaching poetry.

Dr. Swets would always give credit where credit was due. He was never one to take credit for something he didn't do, including work I did. The first time he went away to a conference, I was quick to go into his office and organize the many piles of papers on his desk. I thought it would be a surprise, and it really did turn out to be a surprise. Upon his return he informed me that although no one else might think that he knew which papers were where, he did and he thanked me for attempting to straighten things out, but in the future leave his papers alone. I don't know how he did it, but he always found the papers he was looking for.

The in-house publication called "The Point" was his pride and joy as it piqued the interest of many employees, particularly faculty. The puzzle he would create and put in "The Point" was absolute creative fun for him. I always had munchies in my desk, and Dr. Swets knew where they were. One day he grabbed a handful of "fiber" in my munchies, threw them in his mouth and chewed and said, "Tastes like dog food." He would wander around the various offices and nibble on the munchies. Sometimes he would take munchies from one office and give them to secretaries in another office.

Colorful poinsettias sat on each secretary's desk in the offices of the deans, vice president, and president. The last day before Christmas he came into the office and put his hands around my poinsettia and said, "You don't really want to take this home do you? I know someone who would enjoy it." Off he walked with the poinsettia. Yes, that was Dr. Swets. No one ever knew what to expect from him. But if you needed help, he was there. After he retired, we would occasionally go out for lunch and he would reminisce, telling the many stories and tales that he'd recited so many times before.

In October of 2008 my husband and I stopped at Porter Hills and took some home-made chocolate chip cookies to Dr. Swets and his wife, Van. He sat near the window with his eyes closed, but four of us had a nice visit. I noticed that he was again having difficulty opening his eyelids. In November I received a call from his true friend, Keith Longberg, telling me that Dr. Swets was failing. I was most eager to see him again. As we approached his room, I could see him sitting in a wheelchair waiting for someone to help him into bed. I walked over to him and leaned down and looked straight in his face and said, "Dr. Swets, do you remember me from the college?" "Dee," he exclaimed. Then he turned to my husband and said, "Barry." Then the attendants came to help him into bed. With a very strong belt, the two attendants lifted him onto his bed. One of the attendants made comments in which there was a grammatical error. Instantly Dr. Swets corrected the error and recited the rule to support the correction. I spun around and exclaimed, "The teacher is still alive." It tickled me to hear his retort. There still was a lot of spunk in him.

We visited, talking about different individuals and instances, laughed and yet something inside of me was crying, as I knew I was losing one of the greatest individuals I'd ever known. I thanked him for the faith he had in me, for the latitude he gave me in doing my job, and for the respect he gave me and demanded others give me. After about ten minutes I could see he was getting tired. I picked up his right hand, gnarled from arthritis, and gave it a little kiss as he closed his eyes, and said, "Till we meet again." There will never be a goodbye to Dr. Swets from me. **Dee Palmer**

I was first hired at GRJC (into the Language Arts Department) in 1966 by Dean Frank McCarthy. As then head of the Language Arts Department, Marinus inherited me as he was not involved in the interview. He embraced this gift with his usual blend of curiosity, flamboyance and unusual grace. I loved talking to him but was a little intimidated by his bigger-than-life persona. At that time, I was newly married and, a few months after I began the school year, discovered I was pregnant. I was very worried about

announcing this news to Marinus as now I felt he would have to find someone to hire in the middle of the school year. I made the trip down to his office several times to give him this news, but always retreated. One day, I realized it was time and I had to get the job done. I walked in and told Marinus I was pregnant. His face lit up with a glorious glow and he congratulated me. At this point, I was very taken back by his reaction. I told him that I would be leaving work full-time to take care of my baby and he commented, “You’ll be with us till the end of the year, of course.” I stared at him and said, “But what if I get sick?” Marinus looked at me with the strength and power of his sheer presence and proclaimed, “You won’t get sick.”

And I never did.

Marie Pokora

Twenty-two years ago, I sat in the office of Dean Marinus Swets, waiting for my third interview of the week. I had just come to Grand Rapids from the New Orleans Public Schools, and hoped to join the Language Arts Division faculty at Grand Rapids Junior College. Little did I know that I would feel less like an interviewee during this meeting and more like an interviewer, for Dean Swets was a man of many stories and he encouraged your questions. Those questions, however, told him a great deal about you.

During our time together, I discovered that even though he was an administrator, teaching was his true love. He talked to me about his life, his teaching experiences, and his own writing. To illustrate his points, he turned and retrieved a copy of his book, *Sometimes...and Sometimes Not*, from the shelf behind him. His excitement was apparent as he explained how his ideas for poems and stories came to be. I could sense that Dean Swets’ love of language revealed itself in both the written and spoken word, and that often in each version, he either made his readers and listeners think or pulled their leg—sometimes both at once.

By the time I had to go to my next appointment, I realized that he had interviewed me without really appearing to do so. As we had engaged in seemingly casual conversation, he had sized me up to determine if GRJC and I would be a good fit. I suppose **my** reactions to **his** conversational leads had told him what he needed to know.

It was clear that he loved this college and he wanted whoever came to join its faculty to love it too. Through his approach to my “interview” on that August day, Dr. Swets taught me one of the most important lessons that an English teacher could learn: to convey the love of language in the most unlikely circumstances is to convey what it means to be a teacher.

As I stood up to go, I extended my hand to this Teacher/Dean, this poet, this storyteller. He grasped it firmly and held my gaze with a twinkle in his eye and a chuckle in his voice. “You’ll be fine. This is a great place to work. You’ll be happy here.”

He was right. For twenty years I was happy here, and even in retirement, I’m still happy here. Thanks for the lesson, Dr. Swets.

Carole Redwine

Marinus Swets looms large. Thousands of students, colleagues in the hundreds, recall his tall bearing, a literary analogy of Rachmaninoff in height and large hands ever largely gesturing to help convey words and phrases.

As a student in his poetry class I first met Marinus Swets. The year was 1962. In that class that we gained a deeper appreciation of the correspondence of poetry and music, both vocal and instrumental. He said as much as this: the poem came first, but its course being so akin to melody, poetry lent itself easily to be set to music.

The name Marinus is both ancient Roman and Dutch, derived from either the name *Marius* or from the Latin word *marinus*, “of the sea.” Marinus would surprise us with the twists and turns of his own ethnicity. He’d tease “You think I’m just Dutch, don’t you?” I scarcely knew what to think of such a

question — after all, he attended Calvin College and spoke Dutch, often regaling us with the twists and turns of the Dutch language. One wondered if he were about to play some trick on us. The trick's result was grandly illustrative of the complexity built into each one of us.

According to his own statements, the name Swets was the *nederlandization* of an older patronymic *Švec*. Some of his forebears bearing that name migrated to the Netherlands from Bohemia, somewhere near the ancient city of Pilsen, then a city in the defunct Austro-Hungarian Empire. So the etymology of Swets has a Czech or Bohemian or Austro-Hungarian provenance. *Švec* (pronounced *shvake* to rhyme with *lake*) is an occupational name for a shoemaker. Czech *švec* is a derivative of *šiti* 'to sew.' The Americanization of Czerniojewski led some families to change their last names to Cherny. A similar transformation caused Trazcewski to become anglicized by Tracy. In Spain, McDonald became Maldonado and Jung became Junque. For some in Dutch language areas, Swets was a patronymic derived from a nickname for a person with dark hair or a dark complexion, from Dutch (Brabantine dialect) *zwet* 'black.' For others, Swets could have just as easily been a dialect variation of Swits, a native of Switzerland in the Dutch language.

People believe that the identity of a nation like the Netherlands coincides with a *volk*, an easily discernable ethnic entity. A far more complicated truth is that no nation can claim anything near an absolute ethnic isolation. National boundaries have shifted down through centuries, oftentimes radically. Add to boundary change the effect of human migration from one place to another. It is estimated that during the 19th century some 700,000 people of Polish origin settled permanently in the Ruhr industrial region in western Germany. And this is but one example of myriad patterns of movement. Some of the ancestors of Marinus Swets joined a similar migration from the Czech regions of Austria-Hungary in central Europe to the Netherlands in the north. But enough of origins. Let us talk of Marinus in our daily experience, through several vignettes.

Marinus inclined toward one, perhaps two, of the four symphonies of Johannes Brahms. His favorites may have well been either the Brahms first or third. He would hum the dramatic opening theme for us. Those works arrested his imagination, and his recurrent enthusiasm for them compelled those of us who had never heard them to acquaint ourselves forthwith, and those who had known them before felt constrained to revisit them with greater attention.

Marinus would tell of another student who appeared in one of his classes. Mrs. Wells had been a cabaret dancer touring with Bob Hope's show among others during her young years. She would invariably mispronounce his name: "Oh, Dr. Suits, I love to hear you read those stories!" "Oh, Dr. Suits, you read those poems so beautifully!" Yet Marinus told how Mrs. Wells could be bluntly dismissive of a writer's work, especially those writers under the influence of drink or drugs: "Humpf! He sounds just like a wino to me!"

I witnessed an instance of Marinus's magnanimity: A timorous and somewhat irresponsible student appeared in Marinus's office fearing that his absences from a class would lead to his being dropped. He appealed to Marinus to convince his professor not to drop him. Marinus pointed his giant finger accusingly toward the student and demanded "Are you smart?" The astounded student muttered a meek, barely audible response. "I'm asking you, are you smart?" The student finally admitted he was indeed smart. Smartness trumped skipping classes. "Then get back in that class and do the work and don't miss another session!"

Marinus invited me to join Grand Rapids Junior College in late August 1980. "Richard, this is Marinus Swets. You want to teach English at the College?" The semester was already into its second day. I would be tardy to class. "No matter. Be here tomorrow morning at 8:00." Then he abruptly hung up without even

saying good-bye. He was in a hurry and had others to call. My leaving Creston High School and going to Junior College was well nigh mercurial.

Of the thirty-eight years of teaching German, Spanish, and English, twenty-three of them were at the College. Crossing paths with Marinus was good. Marinus Swets looms large. **Richard Reid**

My first meeting with Marinus Swets lasted one minute. I had driven up to Grand Rapids from Ann Arbor, where I was finishing my graduate work. I had an appointment at the appointed hour, only Van (Mrs. Swets) was home (Marinus had forgotten the meeting time). So Van and I chatted while I helped her fold laundry and the minutes ticked by until I was due back at U. of M. As my ride arrived and I headed out the door, Marinus arrived, apologizing for missing the meeting. We exchanged pleasantries and apologies for sixty seconds and then I was on my way. Back in the car, I told my roommate that there would be no offer coming from GRJC since my interview (if that is what you could call it) was with the English chair's wife. The offer came in the mail the following week – and I have always thanked Van Swets for my job.

That first year, I happily taught English lit. and comp. and sadly put my love of theatre on a very back burner. That was until a group of students went to Marinus with the misguided notion that they wanted to “put on a play.” In either an attempt to get them out of his office and his hair, or in one more example of his idiosyncratic service to the universe, Marinus sent them to me, having heard a rumor that I had “done some theatre in college.” They would not be put off, I was too dumb to realize that I could say no to the all-powerful Marinus Swets, and so a play was done. In the years that followed, every time I tried to get out of the “theatre game,” Marinus would sweeten the pot and my academic career in theatre continued for thirty-three more years.

What a wonderful life it has been and how much of it (maybe 99%) I owe to Marinus. Thank you, Marinus. I will always be grateful. **Fred Sebulske**

Dr. Marinus Swets was our high school teacher at South High...class of 1959...he was always an excellent English teacher... and then he was working at GRCC when I was a faculty member. We both have many fond memories. **Jane Van Belois Beld Smith & Donald B. Smith**

I remember coming to the College and the many acts of kindness shown to me by Marinus Swets. There were numerous times he would give me advice in his folksy manner which was easy to apply. He would also tell me about his mathematical experiences in school. Well, my guess is that Marinus had such experiences to share with educators of every discipline. He was a master of experiences. I particularly remember our talks about his experiences at Davis Tech. My Dad had attended Davis Tech and Marinus filled the vacuum of what Davis Tech was like.

I still remain grateful to Marinus for his actions on my behalf when my father passed away in December 1990. Dad and Mom were in Florida, and it was just about the beginning of semester exams. How could I grieve with my family in Florida and also be at the College to give examinations? Marinus understood and offered a compassionate solution. He suggested that I give my students the option of either taking the exam when I returned or take the grade as of their grade to date, without the final exam. What a relief this option was to me! Well, the students were also grateful, because none expressed the desire to take the examination. Marinus, your act of compassion and kindness impacted my responses later to students and other staff members in their times of need. Thank you, Marinus! **Dave Steinfort**

When I was twenty-one, Marinus, my Pop, took me to the airport. I was going to Guatemala to teach for a year. He sang me an old song he knew called “What is there to say?” We hugged and he said, “Jon, what is there to say?” We turned -- I to my airplane, and he to our home. To my amazement, when I made my first visit to the school in which I would teach, a letter was waiting for me. It was from pop. I remember the last sentences because despite their absurdity, they were just the right things to say. He wrote, “Jon, don’t screw the natives. Fart in bed. Who will care?”

So here I am in 2008, holding his hand while he sleeps under medical care. I imagine him dreaming that he’s back in 1950. It’s a fine day, and a kickin’ tune by Charlie Spivak is playing on the radio. He’s going to pick up a babe named Van and take her to see the ducks on the Flat river.

Just then, a horrendous noise erupts from under the blanket. I feel him squeeze my hand and a grin forms on his face. I can barely hear him as he says, “Fart in bed. Who will care?” And then he’s back to sleep. Criminy, I think. What is there to say?

Johnathan Swets

As I tried to think of some worthy comments for you to add to your January tribute to Marinus, all sorts of Marinusisms came to mind, but so many were lost in a blur. One thing I will always remember is the pot of lentil soup he used to make, the aroma of which permeated the seventh floor of the West Building. I think it made all of us a tad hungry. One day when I asked him about getting the recipe for the soup, he said, “It’s right there on the bag.” So much for creative cooking!

Lucille Thomas

Marinus Swets was lying on his back in a dim room at Porter Hills, eyes closed but seeing. It was November 21, 2008. He was thin, weak and still.

We’d bounced from topic to topic for an hour when, near the end of my visit, he recited a poem. It was something I’d heard him do dozens of times both before and after he hired me away from my law practice; he’d forgotten more poems than I’d ever learned. This time I could barely understand him.

“What’s that mean?” Marinus asked. What – the poem? “I don’t know,” I fudged. He repeated the poem, quickly. I strained to hear, engaged but understanding even less. Marinus looked at me quizzically. “I need to see the entire poem from the start.” “No, you don’t,” he said, but again he went through it, and I caught a few phrases: bramble bush, scratched out his eyes, saw he was blind. “Saw,” said Marinus. “What’s that mean!” What?! I don’t know! “Yes, you do. Why did ---- (a mutual acquaintance) stop drinking?!” This was insanity. Marinus raised himself on one elbow, eyes open, pushing me. “How could he see?! He was blind!” Both of us exasperated, he repeated the last line and paused. “Isn’t that stupid.” And then: “don’t think literally.”

I went home and found the poem: “The Bramble Bush” by Karl Llewellyn. A poem for lawyers. Once again, in what was truly the final exam, Marinus Swets taught me to question by questioning me. He was and is, indeed, still: Himself.

Frederick van Hartesveldt

A Different Kind of Dutch

By Karin Orr

I have always been a little in love with Marinus Swets. Can't help it; don't know why. It's the way things have been since I first encountered him back in 1968, during a faculty meeting at what was then Grand Rapids Junior College. The Chair of the Language Arts Department, Marinus had been on vacation in the weeks before the semester began, so I had been appointed as a new instructor by Dean Frank McCarthy. Marinus and I had never met. In fact, I didn't know anybody and was sitting, waiting for the meeting to start, when suddenly a tall, very tall, presence loomed at my side.

"Orr?" barked a voice halfway between a question and a command. Before I even had a chance to nod affirmatively, the presence continued, scowling: "Swets. I didn't hire you."

Though I have never been in the military, at that moment I knew what it felt like to be a fresh recruit called out by the drill sergeant. I also sensed a challenge; I was going to have to prove myself worthy. The battle was joined, and it ensued in every subsequent interaction.

Each time we met, I wanted terribly to impress Marinus, but this proved impossible. I could hardly even talk to him without feeling like an idiot, let alone make any points. To begin with, there was no controlling where his mind or his mouth might go during a conversation. Every exchange was an unpredictable journey, a verbal "Mr. Toad's Wild Ride," full of twists and unexpected turns, with many a heart-pumping bump along the way. No matter how witty or erudite I tried to be, Marinus was always ahead of me, and, usually, I ended up feeling fortunate to escape with even a shred of intellectual dignity.

Early on Marinus asked me about the subject of my doctoral dissertation. "The poet William Butler Yeats," I replied, a bit smug. Then he reeled off line after line of Yeats's "Crazy Jane Talks to the Bishop." By heart. If the idea of my dissertation were a cartoon balloon above my head, Marinus had just stuck a giant pin in it. I felt flattened.

Marinus was really good at pin-sticking, and he was really good at memorizing. Besides Yeats, he had committed all sorts of poetry and philosophy to memory and peppered his repartee with clever, appropriate phrases. Yet he was never pretentious and quickly squelched or skewered anyone who was (like I said he was really good at that pin-sticking).

"Some people think they can reduce a poem to psychological symbols," he said to me one morning while we were getting coffee in the faculty lounge. My class was studying T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock, and—I must confess—I had gone wildly overboard with Freudian imagery. "But," he continued, striding out the door, "that's not ever all there is in a great work of art." I took Marinus's cautionary if oblique note to heart, realizing that if one looked for phallic patterns they could turn up, as Sir Robert Browne said of his obsessive quincunx, "everywhere."

Marinus was an effective ethical guide, too. As a new faculty member I soon discovered that the representatives of book companies would generously send the latest editions of whatever they published to professors who might teach their texts. I was building a pretty good library of free volumes until Marinus commented: "Some people order books they have no intention of teaching, and that's like stealing."

Once again Marinus had made me reflect on what I was doing. He was an excellent teacher, not only of English literature and language but also of life and how to live it. However, his sense of integrity surprised me, and this reaction takes a little explaining. Marinus was Dutch and very proud of his father, a humble, hard-working immigrant from The Netherlands. I cherished the Studs Terkel-type stories he

told about “the old man,” but he created a picture of a people vastly different from the Dutch I had grown up with out in the farmlands of Kent and Ottawa counties.

The Dutch neighbors of my childhood spent most of Sunday in church and the rest of the week condemning those of us outside their circle to hell. “You ain’t much if you ain’t Dutch” was their motto, and they totally believed it. Their “clannishness,” as my father, a lifelong resident of the area, called it, had made the members of my family biased and bitter.

Marinus, however, was a different kind of Dutch, unlike anyone I had ever known. He was open to new experiences, to other cultures, to the wonder of learning, and so was his brother, Adrian, another larger than life figure, and an artist. Then there was Adrian’s wife, Kathy, a musician, and their talented kids, Marinus’s own wonderful children, assorted aunts, uncles, and cousins. As I got to know the various members of the charismatic Clan Swets, I came to admire not only their individual personalities and gifts, but also the enormous talent and curiosity that animated them all. It was like a family legacy. And it taught me a very important lesson about any type of stereotyping.

I’m sure that at some level Marinus realized how fascinating I found his family and him, especially, and this leads me to what I think is his most endearing quality. Whenever our conversations became in the least bit cordial (and this was not often), Marinus would mention his wife, Van. “Her real name is Edna,” he would whisper conspiratorially. Then he would relate, once more, how they had met at some student banquet at Calvin College. He had been an older, non-traditional student, straight out of the Army, I think. Feeling awkward and out of place at a fancy event, he had, nevertheless, caught the attention of the vivacious and pretty young Van. Somehow she “got” him, appreciated his quirky sense of humor, and seemed to understand who he was.

Marinus would then go on to describe how he was rude and crude, while Van was gracious and lovely. Steadfast and caring, she was every bit as down to earth as he was—his match intellectually and spiritually—and he was wise enough to know it. He was also wise enough to lay it all out, line by line, like an unbreakable boundary around his heart. He was thoroughly “taken,” and he was giving notice, lest there be any chance of misunderstanding.

Very few people know how to do this boundary-setting well. Marinus is a master. He knows who and whose he is and where he belongs. This empowers him to let others know where they stand, too. He can do this lovingly and firmly, all the while smiling his goofy smile, his eyes full of mischief. Silly guy—his deep loyalty makes him all the more irresistible, a friend and mentor who will always have my love and respect as well as a very special place in my heart.

Marinus Swets

A Man of Many Talents

In 1968 I came to the College as an instructor in the Development Program teaching PY 100. It wasn't long before I started hearing the name Marinus Swets being mentioned around the college. Someone told me he was the Chair of Language Arts. At the beginning of the Spring Semester at the faculty in-service, this tall, thin guy got up and started talking about goals and objectives for classroom teachers. I asked the person next to me, "Who is this guy?" I was informed in no uncertain terms that the speaker was none other than Dr. Marinus Swets, also known to his friends as "Slim". As I listened to him speak, I noticed that he had a distinct air about him. He certainly did not lack for self confidence. He was very articulate and informative...he seemed to really know what he was talking about. He appeared to me as a "know it all" person.

A few years later, Wendell Shroll, Dean of the Evening School, came to me and asked if I would be interested in running a special program which was designed to assist low-income, first generation and handicapped students. This program was to be a consortium with Davenport, Grand Valley and Calvin. I remember our share of the grant was \$17,000 and I was concerned that the money be spent properly so I wouldn't get sent to jail. The main component of the program was students tutoring other students. Being fairly new to the College, I indicated I would be happy to take on this extra assignment. After I had taught and directed this program for a couple of years, the Dean of Occupational Education, Bob Duffy, came to me and asked if I would administer another program very similar to the one in existence except this program would be solely for occupational students. I accepted his offer, but indicated I would need some assistance running two programs and teaching full-time. A few days later I got a call from Dean Shroll to come and see him. I stopped by his office and he asked me if I had ever heard of a guy by the name of Tom Deschaine who had been at Aquinas. I indicated I had heard his name but that I knew very little about him. A few days later I saw Dean Shroll and he indicated to me he had hired Tom to help operate the Programs and assist with the teaching.

Tom and I proceeded to operate all of the Programs. It didn't take long before students started hearing they could get free tutoring in a room on the third floor of the Main Building. We had to turn away students who didn't qualify for the programs. Then one day I got the bright idea to write a proposal to Dean Frank McCarthy and ask for some money to provide tutoring for all students. President McCarthy indicated there wasn't any money in the budget for student tutoring. The following fall Superintendent of the Grand Rapids Public Schools, Phil Runkel, named Dick Calkins President of the College. I knew Dick because we had worked together at Creston High School. I dusted off the old tutoring proposal and presented it to him. He thought it was a good idea and gave us some money to tutor all students.

Toward the end of the year Vice-President Corky Eringaard came to us and asked if we could expand our student tutoring, add a Handicapped Student Program and develop an English as a Second Language component. We told him we could, but we would need a larger facility. That summer we moved into the first floor of the West Building, added five staff members and called our project the Educational Development Center.

That fall semester I was informed the College had a new organizational structure and I was now to report to the Dean of Instruction, Marinus Swets. Needless to say, I was not too thrilled with the news of having a different boss (and one with whom I had not established a smooth working relationship). All of that was to change very soon. A few weeks into the semester Marinus called and wanted to meet with

me. I met with him in his office and we started talking about student needs and how we could best serve them. I was happy to see that he seemed to like my ideas regarding how we could expand our services and develop new ones. When I got up to leave, he said to me, "You run that center as you see fit and if you need my help, just let me know." Starting with that meeting, Marinus and I established a great working relationship. Whenever I needed something, I would go to him and I knew he would always help me.

As time went by I decided Marinus needed to know more about the support programs we were operating. By now we had left the consortium with Grand Valley, Davenport and Calvin and we had our own Student Support Services Program. We had also added Upward Bound and had written a proposal for Talent Search (all TRIO programs).

The TRIO programs were well organized politically and the United States was divided into TRIO regions. Each region was composed of from four to eight states and in the fall each region would hold an annual conference. I invited Marinus to attend our Regional Conference in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin so he would have a better understanding of TRIO programs and the political network which had developed to maintain and increase funding.

We checked into the conference resort called the The Abbey and went to our room only to discover that we had one king-size bed. We inquired at the front desk to see if we could get a room with two beds. We were told that the resort was full and no other rooms were available. We went back to the room and Marinus immediately took the bedspread, rolled it up and placed it in the center of the bed. That night both of us slept on our side of the bed, never touching the rolled-up bedspread.

As time went on, Marinus and I developed a wonderful working relationship. I knew he was concerned about helping kids and that was what our Center was all about.

Occasionally, Marinus would invite me to lunch. He loved to go to out of the way places, such as a little Mexican place on South Division which served really hot food. Another place he loved was Mel's Diner on Front Street. At lunch he would start telling stories about the old days when he worked in a tire repair shop and made twenty-five cents for each tire he repaired.

Marinus was a very remarkable person. He was smart, entertaining, and insightful. He enjoyed reminiscing about the past and entertained everyone with his stories and anecdotes, but also thoroughly embraced the challenges of the present moment. He had a heart of gold and would do anything for you. He trusted himself and always acted from a sincere desire to help people become the best they could be. He was a delight, a true original who managed to find a place in everyone's heart.

We are going to miss you, dear friend, because there will always be only one MARINUS SWETS.
We all love you.

Dick Bezile

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VISION

Grand Rapids Community College is a vibrant institution of higher education dedicated to enriching people's lives and contributing to the vitality of the community.



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