

Three Luther Faculty Members Lynn Johnson

I would like to use a baseball analogy to relate to three Luther faculty members who greatly influenced me during my personal and professional life.

The 1906 Chicago Cubs won 116 games, winning a championship that year. The team featured a great double play combination, Tinker to Evans to Chance. They even had songs and prose written about their exploits. My Luther double play combination would be Martin Carlson to Iverne Dowie to Theodore Johnson.

Martin Carlson visited me shortly before my high school graduation to talk about attending Luther Junior College. My mother had attended Luther Academy, so I had some background of the school in Wahoo. Coach Carlson wanted me to play basketball for him, and it did not take him long to convince me that Luther would be a good choice. My high school coach had been an individual who, in the heat of a contest, would lose his temper with his players, other coaches, and the officials. I soon found out that Coach Carlson would be the exact opposite of what I had experienced in high school.

Although the won-lost record at Luther was not outstanding, I soon found out that Coach Carlson exemplified all that should take place in athletics. Not once did I witness him using profanity, or attacking players, fellow coaches, or officials. In my combination I would call Martin Carlson the “Christian Gentleman.”

I had the pleasure of having Dr. Dowie for a number of classes in history, sociology, and political science. Although blind, he was a true “visionary” in every sense of the word. I will cite but one example of what I mean. Dr. Dowie had us subscribe to *Time* magazine to tell us of a world beyond Wahoo, Nebraska. It was in May of 1954 that he referred to an article that dealt with the Supreme Court Decision of Brown vs. Board of Education, Topeka, mainly ending segregation in the public schools. During the course of our political science class that semester we had discussed the gap that existed between what the laws stated, “de jure,” and what society practiced, “de facto.” I recall that Dr. Dowie mentioned that morning that the gap that existed in the area of discrimination had been somewhat narrowed by the Court’s decision, but that this was only the tip of the iceberg and that other areas of society (hotels, restaurants, public transportation, etc.) would be affected someday.

Some ten years later, in 1964, the Civil Rights Bill was passed that would include these areas. Dr. Dowie ended our discussion at class that morning in 1954, with the question, “Can we legislate morality?” I sometimes think of that question and wonder how far we have really come since then. On my double play team, I would identify Dr. Dowie as the “Gentleman and Scholar.”

Pastor Theodore Johnson (“Pastor Ted”) would comprise the rest of my double play combination. He would be the “Man of Principle.” In addition to serving as President of Luther he instructed classes in religion and philosophy. However, he made the greatest impact on my life because of his inspiring and challenging chapel talks. His topics were always relevant, and direct. I feel that he reached most of the students’ lives and actions, although that sometimes made us uncomfortable! I have always remembered one of his favorite phrases, “The world has lots of ‘Sunday Christians,’ but somehow that number is greatly reduced come Saturday.” On a more humorous note, Pastor Ted was loyal and enduring to his beloved Chicago Cubs, usually predicting that they would win the pennant the coming season. Sometimes, when I see or hear the baseball scores, I look up heavenward and say, “Pastor Ted, the Cubs lost again.” Somehow I think that he would reply, “Wait till next year!”

So, Carlson to Dowie to Johnson is my Luther double play combination. These three greatly affected my life, and I think that in today’s world, they would still be winners!