

Walter A. Konetzka 1923–1992

Walter Konetzka's life was more than academic credentials, teaching awards, publications, and committee work. To describe him only in those terms would be to ignore all that made him Walt.

He had impossible energy. He didn't amble down the hallways of Jordan, he parted traffic like Moses at the Red Sea. He couldn't sit still for more than five minutes. There must be a dip in the floor between the lab table and the blackboard in Jordan 124 from his years of pacing back and forth.

He had enormous sensitivities and some blind spots. Music, especially Mozart, gave him goose pimples. He could put himself in others' shoes better than anyone. He knew how to teach without making people feel stupid. He knew how to be discriminating and critical without criticizing. He was almost always kind, caring, and incredibly thoughtful. But when he wasn't, he was an awesome force—you didn't even want to be in the same town with him.

He inspired academic excellence. He paid attention. He could concentrate ferociously on a process, an idea, or a person. He was effortlessly creative and could confront an issue or a problem and see solutions other people didn't see.

He could (and often did) cut to the chase and wasn't always patient once he got there. He understood that decisions made led to consequences which could be predicted (and sometimes weren't).

He had vision. It isn't surprising that the core curriculum was his idea, and because of the core, biology began hiring molecular biologists before other universities. It isn't a fluke that he established and oversaw the undergraduate advising office. It isn't astonishing that biology (and almost no other department) has established a pattern of rewarding good teaching by faculty in much the same way good research is rewarded.

He had amazing skills and enthusiasms. His ability to translate color and texture into stained glass was uncanny. He was more than a talented amateur and approached stained glass and a subsequent interest in arts and crafts with his normal single-mindedness.

He flirted with woodworking and, given time, probably would have printed wallpapers. He was an immensely private person, a difficult characteristic for someone so often in the limelight. He hated confrontations even though, as a champion of the underdog, he was part of many. He invented makeup exams so he wouldn't have to pass judgment on students' reasons for missing tests.

He had a wonderful sense of humor, was a great audience, and was a very funny man. His favorite story, and one he told often, occurred when Rollin Richmond, then



Cuts were one of the hazards of Walt Konetzka's stained glass hobby; here, he sports his customary Band-Aid.

chair, was trying to convince him to take the position of associate chair. They were standing in the hallway talking, and classes let out. Richmond's eloquent pleas prompted Konetzka to say, at his usual decibel level, "All I want to be is a lousy professor." A passing student immediately shot back, "Then you should be a happy man."

He was a happy man and shared his happiness with all his usual intensity. He enjoyed microbiology, teaching, retirement, his friends and students, his family, his grandchildren, his garden, and music, and he worked as hard at them as everything else in his life.

It is typical of his impact that Bloomington's arts community will miss him after only a few years of his attention almost as much as all of us who delighted in him for so long. He should have had more time, but he would have been the first to say, "What ever made you think life is fair?"

Walter Konetzka's life made a difference. How many of us can say that?

The Konetzka family has established an endowment fund in microbiology in Dr. Konetzka's honor. Contributions (made payable to the IU Foundation, the "Walt Konetzka fund") from those whose lives he touched would be welcomed.

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