His “Infinite Variety”
A Friend’s Personality

The majority of us are characterized by a single profession or enthusiasm in life. Such is not true of Robert Hegel who was born in Chicago to parents who had immigrated to this country from Sweden in the early part of the century. He was not old enough to serve during World War II, but enlisted upon graduation from high school and served in a special unit of the 82nd Airborne Division as a glider trooper. Having then qualified for educational benefits, he was able to attend Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois, where he earned a B.A. in English and made the tennis team. This was followed by further academic study at Northwestern University, Evanston, where English turned to a master’s degree in political science with an emphasis on public administration. Then, for twenty-eight years, he served as a public administrator; ten of those years were as a city manager. For some that would be a career in and of itself. However, that was only the beginning.

In 1981, Robert Hegel decided on a new career, and a very different life. He came to W.M.U. to earn a second M.A. in English/Professional Writing. With this degree in hand, he was invited, in 1983, to join the faculty of the Business Information Systems department in the College of Business at the University. He has been teaching in the Haworth College ever since. And what does he think of this radical change in his life? “Teaching is the most fulfilling activity I can imagine,” is his response to the question.

When asked about other lifelong pursuits, his answer is prompt and succinct: music. Robert is married to Peggy, an accomplished pianist and teacher with a large studio of students. He frequently helps her organize student recitals and competitions. The Hegels have two daughters, both of whom have degrees in music from the University of Michigan. Anne, the elder, graduated magna cum laude in viola performance. To this specialization, she has added a master’s degree in library science from the State University of New York at Buffalo. Susan, the younger, studied oboe, but has also earned a Ph.D. in Communication Disorders from the University of Oregon. Since Robert will admit that he plays the alto recorder, one can easily visualize the family musical quartette with a piano, a viola, an oboe, and an alto recorder—a variety of wonderful instruments and sounds.

Music is not the sole point of harmony in Robert Hegel’s life. Peggy Hegel is originally from Boulder, Colorado where her family inherited an authentic mining supervisor’s cabin built in 1887. The cabin is located above Nederland at an elevation of 8,650 feet. For those who do not know, Nederland is some twenty miles west of Boulder and 3,000 feet higher. It is a place where sky and mountains and peace create a unique harmony of their own. The Hegels, young and old, have traveled there every summer to refresh themselves and to delight in the special environment.

No one will be surprised to learn that Robert is an avid reader. His favorite interest is Norse literature—Danish, Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian, Swedish. He has read most of the primary works that have been translated and is well into the criticism.

Besides Colorado, music, reading, and tennis—his college sport—Robert has two projects to pursue when he retires. First, he wants to learn to read Swedish so that he can study the Norse literature that has not yet been translated—no small task to undertake. He also intends to study music theory; this ambitious goal is based on the thought that if he knows how music is composed and performed, then he will enjoy it to an even greater degree. And if those additions to his interests are not enough, he can always turn back to the Friends of the University Libraries. Robert was one of the first to answer the call for people to assist in forming such a group at W.M.U. He not only came to the organizational meeting, but became a member of the Steering Committee that did the “nuts and bolts” designing to establish the foundation for the organization. At the first election of officers, Robert was selected as a member of the Board of Directors and is currently serving as the Vice President.

Numerous adjectives might be used to characterize Robert Hegel but when put together, there is unusual variety and breadth of interest—a remarkable Friend, indeed.

G.E.

Ralph Waldo Emerson