

Augustana College
Chapel of Reconciliation

Matthew Pehl

“Lyn Oyos”

Heritage and Hope at Augustana

14 Feb 2011

Lyn Oyos—

- 1) In a sesquicentennial academic year marked by a campus-wide reflection on the past of our college, it seems especially appropriate to consult the history department. It is historians, after all, who are charged with the particular disciplinary responsibility for preserving our collective memory. Even more appropriately, our reflection shifts today not just to history in general, but to one historian in particular: Lyn Oyos. Perhaps more than any other academic over the last half century, it was Lyn who forged the shape of the students and faculty of the history department. Down to the present day, the history department, in many ways, reflects Lyn’s vision of how the past should be studied and taught.
- 2) Introducing Lyn
 - a. Lyn began his career at Augustana College in 1957. We were lucky to get him. Just two years earlier, one of his college advisors had recruited him to apply for the CIA—this at the height of Cold War tensions, when the world of espionage was saturating popular culture. It might have seemed a meaningful, attractive, even adventurous career choice for a talented young man at the time, but Lyn decided to continue his career in education. He had served as a high school superintendent between 1951

and 1955, and decided to pursue a doctoral degree at the University of Nebraska. Meanwhile, some of his former high school students had proceeded to attend Augustana College, where glowing reviews of Lyn's teaching led Augie's president to send him a letter inviting him to consider joining the faculty. Lyn accepted, even though his salary as a beginning professor was lower than his earnings as a high school superintendent, his dissertation was unfinished, and he and his wife had a new baby. Which means that, during his first year, Lyn was simultaneously writing new, daily lectures for students he didn't yet know, writing a dissertation on naval history in the middle of the Great Plains, and settling into a new house in a new town with a new baby. You can imagine that these were long days.

- b. Needless to say, Lyn survived the first year, and proceeded to thrive at Augustana. He became famous for his compelling lectures and mentorship of students. He also became a key faculty voice on the campus, becoming, in the late 1960s, the first faculty representative to serve on the Board of Regents—surely a sign of the mutual trust and respect Lyn engendered in both fellow faculty and the administration.
- c. Lyn was, by this time, the face of the history department. Indeed, he would eventually serve as department chair for 26 years. It was largely through Lyn's leadership that the department grew from 3 faculty members to 5, and his decision-making that shaped the department—and this in the days when his departmental budget was \$400. In the mid-to-

late 1960s, under Lyn's leadership, the history department was remade, and it was Lyn who molded the department with new faces. Between 1966 and 1969, Lyn hired Andre Gustony, Dwayne Matz, Gary Olson, and John Blylsma. These faculty would in turn serve both the department and the college for years to come, in many capacities. And, as Lyn insists, they also provided moral leadership and built an environment of close collegiality. We shouldn't lose sight of how remarkable an achievement this was: in a profession sometimes infamous for clashes of personality and ego, Lyn's history department *retained* its faculty for over two decades, in the process developing a reputation for stability, professionalism, collegiality, a dedication to students, and a broad commitment to responsibilities across the campus and throughout the Sioux Falls community, including faith communities.

- 3) But I'm sure Lyn would also remind us that history is not only about persevering memory. More significantly, history is fundamentally about the interpretation of memory, about ascertaining the meaning and purpose of the past, not simply the compiling events that comprise it. Put another way, history is what makes the past meaningful for the present, and suggests a path into the future. Which raises the question: what meaning and purpose can we derive from Lyn Oyo's contributions to Augustana?
 - a. First, lead through example. If we want to inhabit a world in which learning is valued and ethical behavior encouraged, we should behave as if that world already exists—even if we know better. Many students

absorbed this ethos—as Lyn points out, the Augie history department has produced an unusually high number of graduates who have proceeded into the ministry, many more than comparable church-affiliated colleges in the region.

- b. Second, keep working. Mike Mullin has told me that Lyn was the best lecturer he has ever heard. This is clearly not accidental, but the result of meticulous preparation and a continual refinement of method. Lyn perfected the art of structure and organization in his teaching, but it came as a result of diligence and dedication. This work ethic transcended the classroom; since he retired in 1994, Lyn has worked on or contributed to seven different books (in retirement).

Third, remain open to new ideas. Lyn always promoted innovation in pedagogy. He developed reading-and-discussion based seminars, continually experimented with the possibilities of JTERM, participated in team teaching across disciplines, and worked to make course offerings responsive to student needs and interests. Lyn, for instance, offered Augustana's first-ever course on the history of feminism in the early 1970s.

- c. Fourth, and finally, persevere—During Lyn's tenure, the history department taught and operated out of the old barracks, a building scrupulously avoided on campus tours for prospective students. Lyn has noted how more than one lecture was interrupted by the occasional rodent darting across the classroom. For years, Lyn led the effort to improve campus facilities for the social sciences. He retired in 1994, so he never got a chance to teach in the Madsen center; but he raised the first shovel at

the groundbreaking, and his perseverance in working to improve this college has paid off handsomely for us today. History is better because of Lyn's contributions. And so is the future.

HERITAGE AND HOPE AT AUGUSTANA

Monday, February 14, 2011

Prelude *“Partita on O God Our Help in Ages Past”* Paul Manz

Welcome/announcements

Invocation

Psalm 77: 11-20, read responsively by half verse

Prayer

Hymn *“O God our Help in Ages Past”* ELW #632

Scripture Hebrews 12: 1-2

Message Matthew Pehl, history

Lord’s Prayer

Benediction

Postlude *“O God Our Help in Ages Past”* David Cherwien

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

HERITAGE AND HOPE AT AUGUSTANA. Hear lively and insightful stories of Augustana’s past and becoming as new faculty members bring the insights of conversation with emeriti professors from their department. This series will continue each Monday this month.

SPRING SEMESTER SERVICE LEARNING - Student participants and leaders are sought for these service learning trips next spring. Costs are reduced for leaders willing to help with recruitment and planning.

See Pr. Paul or Carol if you are interested.

March 18-21 - Joy Ranch, Watertown. Cost is \$25 for gas

March 24-27 - Pine Ridge Reservation. Cost \$125

May 22-26 - New York City. Cost is \$800 including flight, housing, most food and Broadway play ticket. **Full payments for Joy Ranch and Pine Ridge, and \$300 deposit for NY due by Feb. 28th.**

Pastor Paul is available to support students [and friends of students who want to be helpful.] He particularly has wide experience in healing from depression, walking with grief, probing vocational discernment, and exploring changing faith. He's happy to meet with either individuals or small groups.

CHAPEL SCHEDULE

Tuesday (15 th)	Koinonia, 10 am (pre-seminary group_
Wednesday (16 th)	Holy Communion, 10 am - Pr. Paul; Russell Sveninngsen, special music
Friday (18 th)	Worship, 10 am - Laura Johnson, Sr. Spkr.
Sunday (20 th)	Worship, 11 am - Kristen Wilcox
Monday (21 st)	Worship, 10 am - Heritage and Hope Series
Wednesday (23 rd)	Holy Communion, 10 am - Tom Meyer
Friday (25 th)	Worship, 10 am - Laurel Duncan, Sr. Spkr..