

Born to teach

By CINDY PAAVOLA '84 BA

George Javor was born to teach. Although he desired to become a physician through much of his youth and young adulthood in Hungary, there really was never any doubt that his life journey, despite its many twists and turns, would one day lead him to the classroom.

This was true even when his family couldn't afford to send him to college; even when World War II raged around him and his young bride, Klara; even when the couple made their harrowing escape in 1946 from Hungary to Vienna through what would later be known as the "Iron Curtain," or when they landed on the western shores of the United States of America; and even when he left Klara in Seattle and traveled to Alaska to work in the salmon fisheries.

Most everyone who met Javor along the way said, "He is a scholar. He was born to teach."

One surprise in this story of destiny was that the bulk of Javor's teaching took place at Northern Michigan University — half a world away from his native land and half a country from where he started his life in America. It was, as Klara often says, quite a journey.

As an impatient five-year-old, Javor decided he would not wait one more year to learn to read, so he taught himself. It was the first, but certainly not the last time, Javor would amaze those around him with his incredible learning skills.

When he started school a year later, his teacher had Javor assist in teaching his classmates — which Klara said, "was the most natural thing for him to do."

Before age 10, Javor learned German by listening in on his older brothers' tutor. Over a lifetime, he would add Greek, Latin, English, French, Spanish, Turkish, Finnish, and Russian to his repertoire.

While working on his doctorate in languages and philosophy at the University of Budapest and with World War II overtaking Europe, Javor tutored others to help support his family. He also became a regular listener of the British Broadcasting Company and BBC broadcaster Edward R. Murrow, who he said "sounded like God's older brother" and helped him "dispel the lies the Nazis wove around us."

During this time, Javor got his hands on a Russian grammar book and dictionary. Amid air raids and desperate living conditions, Javor devoured its contents and became fluent in about six months. He told Klara, "If we die, we don't need it. If we live, we will."

Javor used his new skill to work for a local newspaper, translating Russian to Hungarian. His translating experience caught the attention of his professors, and he was awarded a one-year scholarship to study at the University of Leningrad. But listening to the whispered conversations at the newspaper office, Javor began to realize that life in the Soviet Union was not as its government promoted. He noticed fear in the eyes of colleagues when he asked questions about Russia, and he soon realized that there were spies closely watching those who understood Russian.

Javor told Klara that he would not go to another totalitarian system. He wanted to smuggle them out of

the country and start over in the free world. Still today, telling of their illegal escape from Hungary — the haunting need for secrecy, the terrifying moments expecting the soldiers to pull them from the buses and trains — brings tears to Klara's eyes.

Once across the border, the Javors went to a United Nations' Relief and Rehabilitation Administration Camp in Bavaria, but found the emigration doors to the United States closed, so they moved on to Paris where Javor resumed his studies. In 1951, when President Harry Truman signed the second Displaced Persons' Act, the Javors were finally able to emigrate to America with sponsorship of a Seattle family.

"Two weeks after our arrival, George was flown to Alaska for a job in the salmon fisheries," said Klara. "It so happened that the busy fishing season was already in progress and one of the fisheries fired a drunkard, so they needed a quick replacement. They got word to a Seattle employment agency: 'Send up the next guy who walks in and has two legs and two hands.' This turned out to be George."

Working during the summer in Alaska for the next three years, however, allowed Javor to spend the rest of the year studying for his teaching certificate at the University of Washington. He taught in Pacific Coast high schools until the Russian space satellite program, Sputnik, renewed the interest across the United States in developing intensive foreign language programs, especially at the university level. Javor was sought after by many colleges and moved to the Midwest to teach in Wisconsin and Indiana. In 1968, he was recruited



WHEN IN ROME... Dressed in a toga on the first day of the semester, George Javor always tried to bring a touch of ancient Roman culture to his Latin classes.

to come to Northern.

During his 18-year NMU teaching tenure, some students would hear of Javor's journey to Marquette, but most would not. He did not talk a lot about himself, colleagues said, being much more interested in the views of his students.

"He lived for teaching," said Klara. "He loved to sit for hours on end discussing with his students, often having groups of them at the house. He loved it when they brought him their problems and when they came to him with a desire to learn."

The thing about Dr. Javor, students would say years after graduation, was that he was quick to praise them for trying and he was a great listener. They also would say that Javor seemed to realize that you cannot truly learn a new language without understanding at least some of the culture behind it. They tell of how Javor would come to the first Latin class of the semester wrapped in a toga, and the language lessons would start with a trip to ancient Rome.

Javor retired from Northern in 1986, but his teaching, of course, con-

tinued. He still taught Russian and Latin classes at NMU as well as teaching Spanish at Marquette's state prison, Russian at Marquette High School and K.I. Sawyer, and doing private tutoring.

And nearly every day of his retirement until cancer made him too sick to go, Javor visited NMU's Lydia Olson Library and Marquette's Peter White Library. "His greatest pleasures in life were reading, learning, and teaching," said Klara. "He was a walking encyclopedia."

Following his death in 2000, the Dr. George Javor Memorial Endowment Fund was established for the purpose of acquiring library resources that support the study of languages, etymology, semantics, world literature, and culture. Klara believes Javor would be "thrilled" to think that, indirectly, he was still involved in teaching.

To donate to the Javor Memorial Fund, contact the Development Fund at 906-227-2627, by e-mail at devfund@nmu.edu, or by mail at 1401 Presque Isle Avenue, Marquette, Michigan 49855.

Siblings endow scholarship in memory of NMU alumna

Joe Bester '77 BS and **Bonnie Johnson** have endowed the **Karla Bester '76 BA** English Scholarship in honor of their sister, a summa cum laude graduate of Northern and a published poet, who died in 2000.

The scholarship will be awarded annually to an NMU English major. It is one of five privately funded scholarships for English majors.

Three others have endowed new scholarships to *This Decisive Season: The Campaign for Northern Michigan University*:

John and Susi (Cossette) Dahlke Scholarship

An annual award to a business or education major of sophomore or higher class status and a graduate of an Upper Peninsula high school.

John '62 BS and **Susi '63 BS**, who is a former school teacher and current president of the NMU Alumni Association, reside in Marquette.

The Luther and Gladys Gant Memorial Endowed Scholarship

Elizabeth Hosking Binda '37 BA, a former teacher at the John D. Pierce School, has endowed an education scholarship in honor of Luther and Gladys Gant. Preference will be given to students graduating from a U.P. high school.

TriMedia Consultants Scholarships

The TriMedia foundation will award two \$1,000 scholarships annually to NMU students. One scholarship will be awarded to a student of academic excellence and the other to a Wildcat student athlete.

The academic award will be presented each September to a biology, chemistry, or geography major with a 3.25 or better grade point average who is an undergraduate from the Upper Peninsula. The athletic scholarship will be presented each January to a varsity team participant.