

JUST WHAT'S A UNIVERSITY FOR?

By Arthur Hoppe*

Once upon a time there were twin brothers named Damon and Pythias Smeecher who shared a deep love of learning. The only difference between them was that Damon loved to acquire learning and Pythias loved to give it away.

Loving learning as they did, they naturally joined the faculty of the University of Megapolis, which was the greatest treasure trove of learning in the whole wide world.

Damon decided to become a scholar of ancient Etruscan funeral orations because he loved dead languages and things like that. Pythias decided to become a teacher of Life, because he loved life and things like that.

In hardly any time at all, Damon became the greatest scholar of ancient Etruscan funeral orations in the whole wide world. He wrote papers and books and was universally recognized as a leading authority in his field by both other authorities in his field.

The only cross he had to bear was the university regulation requiring him to lecture to students from 1 p.m. to 1:40 p.m. on alternate Wednesdays.

With a great effort, he would tear himself away from his beloved Etruscan funeral orations, scurry to the lecture hall and rattle off his lecture without once looking up from his notes. Actually, he delivered the exact same lecture every alternate Wednesday for 32 years. But as he delivered it entirely in ancient Etruscan, which nobody understood, there were few complaints.

So grants poured in to Damon from the Ford, Rockefeller and Maidenform Foundations. He was made a full professor at 27, head of his department at 31 and was always described at faculty teas as "a jewel in the diadem of this great university."

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Meanwhile, his brother Pythias became the greatest teacher of life in the whole wide world.

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His students loved him. They would flock to sit at his feet as he taught them how the stars wheel in their courses, why a cowslip blooms and what goodness was. He poured out everything he knew about everything and a generation of students grew up wiser and kinder, instilled with a love of learning and a love of life.

Of course, this kind of teaching took a lot of time and Pythias never did finish his paper entitled "What Life Is All About." But, as he said to himself, "No scholarly journal would publish a paper like that anyway."

At the age of 62, Pythias was called into the dean's office. "Look here, Smeecher," said the Dean, "I noticed your name on the faculty roster. What do you do around here anyway?"

"I guess I just teach, sir," said Pythias apologetically.

"Good heavens, Smeecher," cried the Dean, canceling his contract of the spot. "how can we go on being the greatest treasure trove of learning in the world, if you keep giving the stuff away?"

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MORAL: The modern university is a perfect place to get an education. If you're a member of the faculty.

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