

Reflections of J. Finley Oden

Few periods of one's life are more important than those formative years between adolescence and adulthood that usually coincide with the college years. It is a time when one leaves the security of his home and family and ventures into a foreign world of new people, new ideas, the excitement and challenge of university life and the arduous transformation from a green high school graduate into some early version of a professional. It is there that, if you're lucky, you can savor the excitement of science and engineering and have imparted to you the enthusiasm for subjects that will last a lifetime, that not only provide a richer and fuller view of life but also the means to build a career and to contribute something to the profession and to society at large.

Many times since those early days at LSU have I thought how lucky I was to spend those years at this great university and to enter an engineering school with high academic standards and an excellent faculty devoted to producing not

only good engineers, but also educated professionals. What excellent teachers I had: Drs. Frank Germano, Beverly Covington, Dale Carver, and many others, all with a deep and conspicuous love for their subjects and an excitement about it that I've only witnessed a few times since. The atmosphere was infectious to students, and many of us were caught by the beauty of mechanics, and mathematics, and of their application to engineering problems, and have never really recovered from that infatuation. The engineering faculty at LSU in those days, and I'm sure the same is true today, gave unselfishly of their time to the students. There was a certain reverence for the material they taught, and when we students finally struggled through the intricacies of the subject matter and saw it applied in the solution of real-world problems, it quite naturally gave us a sense of pride and a certain sense, perhaps false at the time, to use natural things and natural laws to create something of benefit to society. This is what engineers do, and I believe that LSU and its faculty were able to not only impart that

message to its students, but at the same time embellish the subject by highlighting its intellectual content as well. I will never forget Frank Germano telling the class one day that, “without knowing the fundamentals, without basic mechanics and theory, the search for a solution to an engineering problem is like groping for a pin in the darkness. You may accidentally prick your finger on it, but then the solution is never satisfactory. Understanding the fundamentals of the subject is like turning on a light, with the solution there exposed for you to see.”

There were, of course, many personal things I remember about those days at LSU – the many friends and the many experiences that helped mold me into what I am today. I do know that when I left LSU and went elsewhere, I found myself very well prepared to face the challenges of graduate school, research, teaching, and professional engineering. I can therefore assure you that receiving this honor from an institution to which I feel I owe so much is an especially gratifying experience and one that I will always cherish.