



Richard Bowles, 1918 - 2009

UF band director and fishing writer for Sun, dies at 91

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Richard W. Bowles wore many hats in his long career: director of bands at the University of Florida School of Music, a writer of both words and music, avid fisherman, conservationist, columnist for The Gainesville Sun. The World War II veteran arranged Gator fight song.

Friends and colleagues say Bowles, who died Monday at the age of 91, would most like to be remembered as a teacher. "He taught everybody he knew," son Daniel Bowles said Tuesday.

Bowles was born in 1918 in Rogers, Ark. He graduated from high school at 15 and was already an accomplished musician, especially proficient on the trombone. He met his future wife, Margaret Alice Thompson, known to all as Tommy, while attending Indiana University. The couple married in 1941.

During World War II, Bowles served in the Army Air Corps as a musician, playing in and leading bands. After the war, he returned to school, earning his master of music degree from the University of Wisconsin in 1949.

The family, which now included two children, settled in Lafayette, Ind., where Bowles was band and orchestra director in the public school system. He was already becoming known as a composer in band circles, and his best-known composition, "Burst of Flame," was published in those years.

Dan Bowles recalls four-week-long family vacations at Fort Myers Beach. "Dad's love of fishing and

Florida weather led him to apply for college teaching positions in the state, and in 1958 he got his chance at the University of Florida," he relates.

Bowles took a position as assistant director of bands, and in 1961 was named director of bands. In 1962, he was elected to the American Bandmasters Association, the first of many honors. Anyone who has taken a seat in Ben Hill Griffin Stadium for a UF football game has experienced a bit of Dick Bowles' legacy. As director of the Gator marching band, Bowles produced many compositions. For him, the halftime show was the game.

The Gator fight song, "The Orange and Blue," that the team sings after a game ends? Arranged by Bowles. He's had more than 100 arrangements published. Gary Langford, who followed Bowles as band director, described the unique unit that is a marching band. For starters, then and now, most of the band members are not music majors. But in their time practicing band formations and learning compositions, they learn a lot about life.

"Band teaches discipline, work ethic, precision, responsibility and camaraderie," Langford said. "We took eight buses to Atlanta last Saturday, filled with students who all had the right uniforms and came prepared to play. That's inherent in the gig. With 330 people in the band, they have to learn responsibility."

Langford wasn't naming names, but he said some college band directors have built a reputation as tyrants. That wasn't true of Bowles. "Dick was very task-oriented," Langford said, "He was about the nicest guy you'd ever know, but he expected you to do the job and do it right."

Whether it was learning how to fish, working with the concert band or marching band, or writing the many articles he had published, it had to be done the right way, Langford said. "I think he'd like to be remembered through the accomplishments of his students, and for his dedication to the university," Langford added.

Bowles stepped down as band director in 1975 after a mild heart attack, but continued to teach full time until his retirement in 1985. Retirement from the university just gave him more time to devote to his other loves: fishing, the outdoors and environmental issues. He began writing a fishing column for The Gainesville Sun in 1978.

Rob Oglesby, who was then managing editor of The Sun, recalls Bowles' proposal that he write a column that would be entertaining and educational. His columns - some 800 in all - appeared for the next 15 years. For those who fished, they provided essential information about what was biting, and where. For those who'd never fished, Bowles' words made them wish they'd been out there on the water with him. "Dick's columns were written in painstaking detail, the same way he fishes," Oglesby recalled. "Very little went unnoticed by Dick. That is one thing that makes a great fisherman, and a good reporter and writer." A collection of 48 of his columns were published in book form as "A Pinch of Salt" in 2002.

Bowles was an emeritus professor of music when he was approached by 20th Century Fox about using his arrangement of "When the Saints Go Marching In" in the 2002 film "Drumline." Longtime Gator fans may recall the marching band playing the same arrangement when the team played Miami in 1964, earning a victory that sent them to a postseason bowl.

Langford said that Bowles' legacy is in the hundreds of students of his in the Gator band program who have gone on to all manner of successful careers. A number have gone on to become band directors all across the country. Dan Bowles played for four years in the band his father directed. He said that his father's students felt not just taught, but mentored. "He managed to do it all with such good grace," Dan Bowles said Tuesday. "I never saw him raise his voice. He always kept his cool in tough situations, and he passed that on. "He taught me that you don't have to be a fiery jerk to get results. It has been a valuable life lesson for so many," Dan Bowles said. "With Pop, what you saw is what you got." Dan Bowles said that a celebration of his father's life will be planned. Langford added of his friend and colleague: "He and Tommy were two of the most wonderful people you'd ever hope to meet. Perhaps the times have become too fast-paced, but you don't find people like Dick Bowles anymore."