

“I received a Rackham Prize fellowship which allowed me to write full-time and finish up in 1970. As a graduate student, it made a huge difference in my life. That’s why I’m interested in continuing to support the Rackham graduate program as long as I can.”

By Jeff Mortimer

Frank Beaver chose the University of Michigan for his doctoral work in part because he wanted to study with Kenneth Rowe, who had been Arthur Miller’s writing teacher. But the most enduring benefit of that class may have been some advice he got from a student who shared a desk with him.

“He said, ‘Go to Rackham; they have a lovely room in the basement where you can have your lunch and great study rooms upstairs,’” recalls Beaver, the Arthur F. Thurnau Professor of Communication. “I wrote my dissertation on the second floor. I’ve written and edited six books in that one chair at Rackham. To this day, I still use it when I really need to write. I don’t do anything else there, no crossword puzzles, no income tax. It’s a little bit illegal to be there when you’re no longer a grad student, but they’ve been great about it.”

“Great” would be an apt description of Beaver’s career as a teacher, critic and historian of film. Known throughout the area from his 25 years as a regular on Michigan Radio, his writings have spread his influence throughout the world. His *Dictionary of Film Terms*, for example, was translated into Mandarin Chinese and published in Beijing in 1993, and his expertise on statutory and self-regulatory controls of motion picture expression, which originated in his dissertation on legendary *New York Times* film critic Bosley Crowther, has been called upon in several court cases.

“I’m sure that would never have happened had I not been involved in Crowther’s writings,” Beaver says. “One of my chapters is called ‘Bosley Crowther’s Campaign for Free Speech on Screen.’”

The dissertation itself might not have happened without financial help from Rackham. “In order to finish my

degree within three years, I received a Rackham Prize fellowship which allowed me to write full-time and finish up in 1970,” he says. “As a graduate student, it made a huge difference in my life. That’s why I’m interested in continuing to support the Rackham graduate program as long as I can.”

The University matched his most recent gift under the President Mary Sue Coleman’s Challenge for Graduate Student Support. “I don’t think I actually knew about the Challenge,” Beaver admits. “I had been so committed to Rackham and what they do in their various programs that I already planned to make that an organization that I give to regularly.”

When he arrived in Ann Arbor in 1967, Beaver found film courses scattered among a dozen departments. “Students could pick a course here and a course there and everyone saw *Potemkin* twelve times,” he says. “Then an undergraduate named Steve Fetter went and got the syllabi and interviewed all the film teachers. Out of that came the decision to have an interdepartmental undergraduate film and video program that eventually became what is now Screen Arts and Cultures, a full program that offers BAs, MAs and PhDs in film.”

Beaver grew up in Statesville, N.C., earned his first two degrees at the University of North Carolina, then served a tour of duty in Vietnam as an Army intelligence officer. “I was trained at Chapel Hill to be a live television director,” he says, “but I had two little kids when I got out of

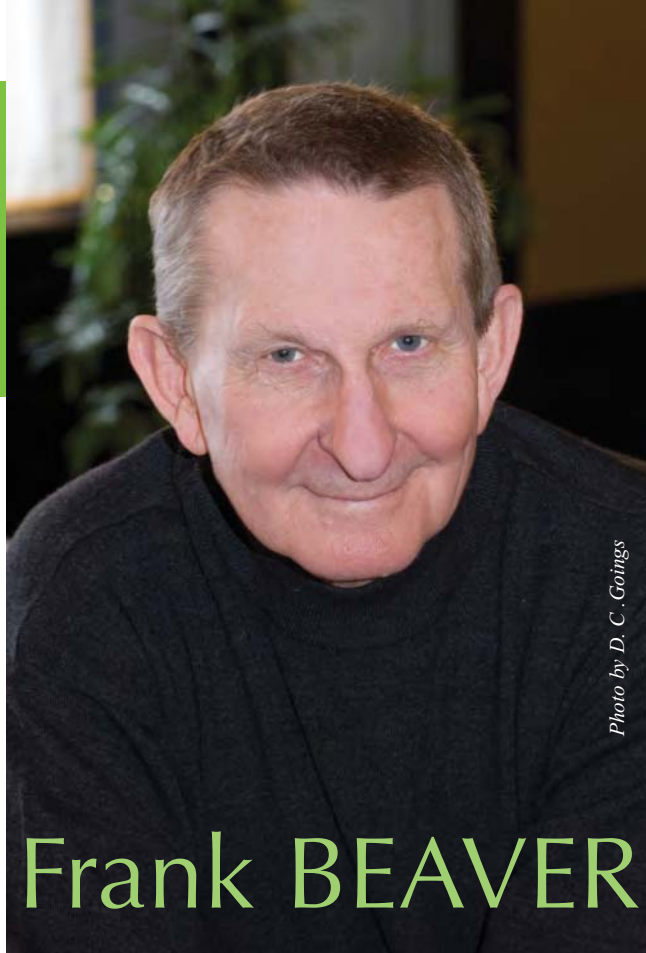


Photo by D. C. Goings

Frank BEAVER

the Army, and Greenwich Village didn’t sound like a good idea.”

The academy did, however. “My teachers and mentors that I loved so much were people who had lively careers as critics and as writers, and taught, and I thought that’s something I’d love to do,” he says. After stints on the faculty at Memphis State and North Carolina, he began his long association with Michigan.

He returned to Vietnam in 2007 for the first time in 45 years to work on his current project, a survey of films made by so-called Viet Kieu, Vietnamese who fled after the fall of Saigon in 1975 and their descendants, many of whom are now returning.

“It was a wonderful, heart-warming experience for me,” he says. “They’re making films about the motherland that are truly beautiful but have very little to do with the war. Nearly 60 percent of the Vietnamese alive today were born after it ended, so Viet Kieu films and filmmakers are constituting a previously unseen view of Vietnam in the West.”

“It’s a whole new learning experience.” ■