

The Electron

Brother Edward Doody and the art of personal chemistry.

“Some angels wear suits, some wear dresses, and at least one wears the collar of a Christian Brother.” — Nathan Pera (’61)

After spending some time with Brother Edward, it is apparent that he is anything *but* elementary. He has a bachelor degree from St. Mary’s College in Winona, MN, a Master of Science in general chemistry from St. Louis University, and a Ph.D. in Physical Chemistry—after four years of concentrated original research—also from St. Louis University. He has continued postdoctoral physical chemistry research during the summers at New York University, Duquesne University, and Argonne National laboratory in Chicago. Currently, he holds the position of Director of Grants and Contracts for Christian Brothers University. He also directs National Science Foundation Chautauqua short courses for professors from 48 states.

Brother Edward and Christian Brothers University were first introduced in 1953. At that time, Brother Lambert Thomas was planning to reopen the four-year college and invited a 28-year old Brother Edward to found the School of Science, which didn’t even have a building to call home. With Brother Robert Staub in Biology and Professor George Carney in Physics, the existing science building was planned and completed, mostly with Brother Edward’s efforts in securing a 3% (yes, that’s 3%) government loan for the science building, the library, Rozier dormitory, and the computer center.

His first role was to serve as head of the department of chemistry, from 1954 until 1964. Dr. Richard Thais, a 1961 graduate and retired CBU professor, remembers Brother Edward’s classes well, especially his Quantitative Analysis class: “Your analysis would have to get within three-tenths of one percent in order to get an A—*three-tenths of one percent!*”

Dr. Thais also remembers Brother Edward’s research, which he frequently shared with the class. “Brother Edward was fanatical about using triple—*triple!*—distilled water in his research,” Dr. Thais recalls. He was most impressed by Brother Edward’s contract with the Atomic Energy Commission from 1958-1976 to research radioactive isotopes specifically uranium chelates. This was quite extraordinary for someone at a school CBU’s size, and given the fact that it was not a research institution. From 1965 until 1978, he served as Chair of the Division of Science and Mathematics.

Nathan Pera, a 1961 graduate, walked across the driveway from CBHS to attend college at CBU. Unsure of what he wanted to do with his life, he followed his friends into engineering only to change his major to chemistry after meeting one of the most influential men in



Brother J. Edward in 1961

BY SHAWNA G. ENGEL (’93)
Director of Alumni Affairs

Notes are scattered across the legal pad. Arrows join a thought at the bottom of the page to one at the top of the page. The comments are short and sweet yet the range in subject matter is worthy of an eye raise. From NASA research to co-ed dances in the Cove to research grants to Christmas formals at Clearpool on Summer Avenue to Chemistry to raising Siamese cats. *Whew!* All of this and more from one individual.

It’s no wonder Brother John Edward Doody is dubbed “the electron.” (Which is, by the way, an elementary particle consisting of a charge of negative electricity equal to about 1.602×10^{-19} coulomb and having a mass when at rest of about 9.109534×10^{-28} gram or about $1/1836$ that of a proton.)

his life... Brother Edward Doody.

"In two weeks I understood everything about chemistry that I had not been able to absorb in high school, all because of Brother Edward," Pera recalls. His decision to major in chemistry was an important step in his life, but he still struggled against the elements that make college, well, college.

"I discovered beer, cards, and the opposite sex, not to mention my love for baseball in the spring," he remembers. "It was hard to attend labs on beautiful spring afternoons when the ball was in the air and a young man's attention can easily be diverted."

Pera eventually persevered thanks to a challenge by the Dean of Studies and went on to recruit for Chicago Bridge & Iron Company. In this position, Nathan found that the only chemistry curriculum that rivaled Brother Edward's was at Purdue. When he returned home to Memphis, Pera had a new respect for CBC and his professor and thus began a new relationship with Brother Edward—that of friendship.

Pera can thank Brother Edward for more than just friendship: The good Brother was instrumental in helping him form his own company, Environmental Testing Consultants, Inc. The company had laboratory space in the science building back in the 1970s, thanks to an agreement between Brother Edward and the former student. Besides being a great recruiting tool for the college, the agreement allowed Pera to build his company into the success that it is today. He is still grateful for the angels God has put in his life disguised as humans: "Some wear suits, some wear dresses, and at least one wears the collar of a Christian Brother."

The 1961 yearbook is dedicated to that angel, Brother J. Edward, "who has worked with all classes of students to the one end of providing men of CBC a well balanced educational and social existence while at CBC." Legendary dances, first held in the basement of Ave Maria Hall (since demolished and replaced by Buckman Hall) and then the Cove (now the theater foyer), are quite a memory for graduates of the 1960s. The jukebox would be hooked up to loudspeakers and the room would be packed with CBC men and their dates, all under the direction of Brother Edward and the Student



Brother Edward in his current position as Director of Grants and Contracts. Dr. Emily Mathis calls him "a storehouse of knowledge."

Government Association. The dances were quite a recruiting tool back then, as visiting high school seniors were introduced to area high school seniors courtesy of Brother Edward. In order to get the ladies to attend (and dare we say the visiting students to ultimately attend CBU), Brother Edward would send postcards to high school senior girls advertising the "free dance." The rest—including the subsequent marriages—is history.

Besides organizing dances and social events for the students and teaching classes, Brother Edward wrote and still continues to write grants for the research and training of students, elementary and secondary teachers, and college professors. He has received grants every year since 1955 from such sources as NASA, the Atomic Energy Commission, the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, and the National Science Foundation.

Dr. Emily Mathis, a 29-year member of the Education Department at CBU, has worked with Brother Edward for over a quarter century on creative-thinking and grant-writing workshops—not only in other states such as Alabama, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Illinois, but also in Singapore and Malta Island. "Brother Edward is just a storehouse of knowledge," she says. "I've been an apprentice for 25 years but I'm *still* learning from him. I feel privileged to be in contact with him."

Brother Edward also found time to publish 25 articles, nine of which are technical articles published in the journals of the American Chemical Society and the remainder relating to the training of students.

After researching this article, I am left wondering if Brother Edward sleeps. He has influenced so many lives—whether through his role as a teacher, social director, or mentor.

But he certainly "doesn't stick around for the accolades" says Emily Mathis. With his dry wit and one-liners, Brother Edward verges on being labeled the *nutty* professor—but one with an incredible capacity to share and to give, especially to this university, its students, and its professors.

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