The stories of our Berkeley alumni can summon the boom of the canon, the smell of freshly cut grass on Memorial Glade, the sight of the sun setting behind the Golden Gate — the familiar elements of the Cal experience. In this issue of Cal Futures, we are pleased to share two of these evocative stories about alumni who invested their energy and talents at Berkeley, achieved success, and continued to give back. Robert O. Briggs ’51 led the Cal Band for nearly a quarter of a century, wielding his baton with an understated grace and connecting with students like few others. Awtar Singh Ph.D. ’66 was an up-and-coming engineer from India who found his calling and his home in California. Using their retirement plans, both Briggs and Singh supported their alma mater and the generations of students who will share and cultivate Cal’s spirit.
Even after Robert O. Briggs ‘51 retired from his 24-year run as a beloved Cal bandleader, he would show up at Memorial Stadium band practices with a cup of coffee and a morning bun from Bette’s Diner.

“He was always part of the picture here and always a welcomed guest,” says current Cal Band Director Robert Calonico ‘76 about his teacher, mentor, and friend. Although Briggs died in 2008 at age 81, Calonico says the band director is “here in spirit.”

“It’s hard because now I have a group of students who never met him,” says Calonico. He notes that Briggs (Berkeley’s first and only “band director emeritus”) is always discussed at band camps to ensure that each generation of Golden Bear musicians learns of the man who marched in four Rose Bowls.

More than 50 students and alumni visited Briggs in the hospital in the days before he died — sometimes serenading him with band favorites — and many more sent cards. “He was truly overwhelmed by the love shown from his Cal friends,” says Erin Proudfoot ‘97, a clarinet player and Alumni Band drum major.

In the first football game following his passing, the Alumni Band placed his uniform hat atop a ladder during “Hail to California” — the song Briggs traditionally conducted on Alumni Band Day. Football players wore “BB” for Bob Briggs on the back of their helmets.

The band was his family

Briggs grew up in Modesto, California, and was the great-grandson of the town’s co-founder. He attended Modesto Junior College before transferring to UC Berkeley in 1947.

While a student, Briggs played the cornet and French horn in the heyday of Cal football under Lynn O. “Pappy” Waldorf — when Berkeley went to the Rose Bowl three times. “The University became a permanent fixture of his life,” says Dan Cheatham ‘59, a Cal Band historian and drum major in 1957.

Although Briggs had left Berkeley after graduation to serve in the Army band during the Korean War and then to direct Fairfield’s Armijo High band, bandleader James Berdahl invited him back to Cal to help fill out the band’s ranks by marching at the Brussels World Fair in 1958 and in his fourth Rose Bowl in 1959. “I am the only Cal bandsman to have done that many,” said Briggs of his Rose Bowl stints. “It was always my goal to conduct at one of them, and we almost did after the ’75 season. But UCLA went!”

Cheatham says Briggs’s rapport with colleagues and most significantly with students defined both his tenure at the University and his continuing relationship with campus. “The rehearsals were down to business, but not necessarily all business,” says Cheatham, explaining that Briggs might work with one instrument group while other musicians talked quietly. “But when he’d go ‘tap tap,’ all side chatter would stop.”

In his earlier days as director, Briggs was more reserved with students and was always addressed as “Mr. Briggs.” In later years, friends say he developed a more casual style and became known to band members simply as “Bob.” When Berkeley band members married (a fairly common occurrence), Briggs enjoyed driving them to or from their nuptials in one of his many classic cars.

“The Cal Band students were his family,” says Proudfoot. “He would remember the name, hometown, and instrument of every single Cal Band member, and even after many years of not seeing someone, he would surprise them by remembering many facts about them.”

After graduation, Proudfoot says she would invite Briggs to her BBQs and game-watching parties. “He would always attend, bringing the sangria!” she says.

Even those who knew Briggs personally may not know that he generously contributed to Berkeley. He established the Robert O. Briggs Scholarship, awarded annually to support a student brass player, and the Robert O. Briggs Family Scholarships for upper and lower woodwind players and a percussionist. Briggs also bequeathed his IRA and annuity accounts to Berkeley to support the Cal Alumni Association scholarships, athletics, Cal Performances, and, of course, the Cal Band.
A hero to office workers everywhere, Scott Adams M.B.A. '86 created the widely loved comic strip Dilbert that pokes fun at cubicle life, dysfunctional bureaucracies, and the personalities of mid-level managers. Adams was born in Windham, New York near the Catskill Mountains. He worked in what he called a series of “humiliating and low-paying jobs” at San Francisco’s Crocker National Bank (including a stint as a teller when he was robbed twice at gunpoint) and then later at Pacific Bell. He sometimes drew Dilbert in the middle of the night while keeping his day job. The comic strip took off in the 1990s, appearing in some 2,000 newspapers in 70 countries by the year 2000. Dilbert was the first syndicated comic strip to go online and was launched into a TV series in 1998. Adams is the author of several books — some related to Dilbert and some not — including The Dilbert Principle, Build a Better Life by Stealing Office Supplies, and the novella God’s Debris: A Thought Experiment. Adams is married and lives in Pleasanton, California.

Answer to “Famous Alum”

A 23-year-old Awtar Singh Ph.D. ’66 found himself constructing his country’s first large dam — the Bhakra Dam — at the request of India’s Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1949. Fresh from Punjab Engineering College and living in a country that largely had missed the industrial revolution, Singh was selected to visit the United States to observe dams under construction, learn about power plants, and return with some western know-how.

“Wall-to-wall carpeting. Air conditioning. Kentucky Fried Chicken. It was heaven,” recalls Singh, then 28 years old. “I promised my wife Teji I’d take her back.”

It took some time to fulfill the promise. Singh returned to India as the senior engineer of the Bhakra Dam construction and then as chief of staff to the general manager of the dam. A young man at the top of his field in India, he decided to take a two-year leave to get his master’s degree in engineering at the University of Colorado.

A promised stipend from the Indian government never came and Singh — who had been a highly paid engineer in India — was a broke graduate student in Boulder. He applied and was accepted to Berkeley for his Ph.D. — receiving “the red carpet treatment” and enough funding to make a home with Teji. “It was a fascinating time with the Free Speech Movement and Mario Savio,” says Singh about Berkeley in the ’60s. “But we were the nerds.”

Singh excelled at Cal and soon became a professor of engineering at UCLA. During that time, he and Teji briefly returned to India to evaluate where to make their permanent home.

Upon his return, Singh says he was brought to tears when he saw scribbled on the blackboard: “Welcome home Dr. Singh.” Indeed, he and Teji had made their choice.

Singh left academia to co-found the engineering firm Lockwood-Singh and eventually steered the company toward expert witness work. He became particularly renowned for his expertise on landslides.

The couple did not have children of their own, but Teji became a Montessori teacher and enjoyed “more than 20 children every day,” says Singh. Together, they built a life over five decades and looked forward to retirement.

Sadly, in 1997, Teji died unexpectedly. “She said, ‘Tomorrow I’ll be home,’” recalls Singh, who left his loving wife outside the hospital elevator for what they thought would be a routine procedure. “When I called at 4 o’clock, I learned that she died on the table. It was so painful.”

Singh says he eventually learned how to do the laundry and find the grocery store. He spent a lot of time working and made his company even more successful. “That is when I said...

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‘I have no children. My wife is not here. I don't even have a cat.’ says Singh.

In 1998, he created the Awtar and Teji Singh Fellowship for graduate students from Punjab Engineering College who are accepted to Berkeley — benefitting eight women and four men in just over a decade. Singh plans to increase the fellowship by donating IRA assets after he is gone.

He has also donated to the University of Colorado, Boulder and to Teji's alma mater in Pakistan. When he is not playing golf, traveling, or publishing his autobiography, Singh is a volunteer tutor for high school students preparing for the SAT.

Shruti Malik M.S. ’01 says she was a first-year student at Punjab Engineering College when she clipped an article about Berkeley's Singh fellowship from her local newspaper and saved it in her diary. "This article became my guiding light and sole inspiration," says Malik, who received the fellowship and is now a California transportation engineer. "Getting the opportunity to pursue a master's at Berkeley was a dream come true for me!"

Malik calls Singh an exceptional, exuberant person who is also a mentor and role model. "Being in his company for a few hours can completely change one's outlook on life and the world," she says.

Malik and other recipients of the Singh fellowship travel to Berkeley from across the globe for reunions every few years. Singh also visits Punjab Engineering College where he says he likes to "fire up" the students. "I tell them, 'If you work hard, you can go to Berkeley,'" says Singh. "And they come. They love to come."

IRA Charitable Rollover Extended for 2011

This issue of Cal Futures features stories of two alumni — Robert O. Briggs '51 and Awtar Singh Ph.D. '66 — who designated Cal as a beneficiary of their retirement plans. Doing so is an increasingly popular way to make a bequest as it allows donors to withdraw what they need during their lifetimes and donate what is left to Cal after their passing. But there is an even more immediate way to donate retirement plan assets.

The Tax Relief Act signed in December 2010 extends the IRA Charitable Rollover through December 31, 2011. It continues the tax code provision that allows donors who are over age 70½ to make a tax-free gift of up to $100,000 from IRAs directly to charities without having to realize it as income and take a corresponding tax deduction. The extension allows federally recognized married couples to make $200,000 in gifts if they have separately funded IRAs. This gift also qualifies to meet the Required Minimum Distribution amount that IRA owners aged 70½ must begin taking.

To learn more about supporting Cal with an IRA Charitable Rollover in the coming year, estate and income tax provisions in the Tax Relief Act of 2010, or naming Berkeley as a beneficiary of your retirement plan, please contact us at ogp@berkeley.edu or call us at 800.200.0575. You may also visit our website at berkeley.planyourlegacy.org.

Fiat Lux!

Kevin T. Crilly, J.D.
Director, Office of Gift Planning

UC Berkeley was honored this year as the world’s “greenest university” in an international ranking that measured the environmental policies of thousands of universities. Developing sustainability initiatives is always front and center at Berkeley and now includes offering Cal Futures in digital format. If you would like to go paperless, please sign up at calfutures.berkeley.edu and receive your fall ’11 issue electronically. At this site, you can view, download, save, and share the latest or past issues of Cal Futures.
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Gifts that take effect at your passing
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☐ Bequests
☐ Brokerage Accounts
☐ Life Insurance
☐ Real Estate

☐ I/We have already included Cal in my/our estate plan.
☐ I am/We are not sure which gift plan would work best. Please contact me/us.

Name(s)

Best time of day to contact me/us: __________________________ a.m./p.m.

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