

In remembrance: Josef Brozek, research professor of psychology

Josef Brozek, a research professor of psychology whose work on the impact of dietary deficiencies culminated in the landmark book *Biology of Human Starvation*, died recently. He was 90.

A native of Melnick, Czechoslovakia, Brozek's academic career was distinguished by groundbreaking research on the effect of malnutrition on behavior, and the nutritional influences on the functions of the nervous system.

One Lehigh colleague described him as a "man of strong opinions who was never afraid to speak his mind."

George Shortess, a fellow professor of psychology who first met Brozek when he arrived at Lehigh in 1959, said that Brozek's candor and directness was tempered by "his Old World graciousness and good humor."

Under a resolution submitted by members of the Lehigh faculty this spring, Brozek was also remembered as an extraordinarily accomplished and committed scholar, a kind and generous friend, a great lover of music, and a man who had nurtured an ardent passion for mycology—the study of fungi—and for the hobby of mushrooming. Richard Redd, Professor Emeritus of Art and Architecture, became a personal friend of Brozek's and recalled a mushroom-hunting excursion "on a fine May morning in 1962."

"Jaschka, as he was known to his friends, asked me if I wanted to go hunting for morels," Redd says. "It was apple blossom time. I didn't know what a morel was, but I was an eager learner. Jaschka had his favorite morel hunting grounds staked out in Saucon Valley, where there were overgrown and abandoned apple orchards. We found an ample cache of morels, took them home and fried them in butter and ate them. I was hooked on wild mushrooms and I still am."

Paul Salerni, professor of music, noted that Brozek played the violin and cello and "had a wonderful collection of Czech music—both scores and records—which he later donated to Lehigh's music department. Jaschka was passionate not just about the masterpieces of the past, but also about music newly written. He was one of those rare faculty members who came to all the LUVME (Lehigh University Very Modern Ensemble) concerts, even those of student composers."

Groundbreaking researcher

Brozek, spent part of his childhood under adverse conditions in

Siberia. His father, a non-combatant in World War I, was taken prisoner by the Russian army and he and his young family were forcibly moved to Russia.

He received his Ph.D. at Charles University in Prague in 1937. His doctoral dissertation was titled “Memory, Its Measurement and Structure: A Psychotechnological Study,” and was completed at a time when behaviorism dominated American psychology, his Lehigh colleagues noted. Three decades later, memory research became a centerpiece of modern cognitive psychology.

He emigrated to the U.S. in 1939, and became a naturalized citizen in 1945. Brozek joined the Lehigh faculty in 1959 after serving 18 years on the faculty of the University of Minnesota, where he was a professor in the laboratory of physiological hygiene in the School of Public Health. Brozek advanced through a succession of posts at the university, ending his time there as a full professor. At this point in his scholarly career, Brozek was perhaps best known for his work with the Minnesota Semistarvation-Nutritional Rehabilitation Study, which was conducted between 1944 and 1946.

Virtually every student of psychology in the 1950s and 1960s was expected to know about the famous Minnesota Starvation Study, his colleagues say.

He came to Lehigh as a full professor and chair of the psychology department and held the position for four years, before being given the title of “research professor”—one of only two professors at Lehigh at that time to have that distinction. That position allowed him to devote considerable time to the study of the history of science and of psychology.

On the teaching and training front, Brozek considered his greatest contributions to be two summer institutes on the history of psychology that were funded by the National Science Foundation. Brozek designed and trained college teachers at institutes held at the University of New Hampshire in 1968 and at Lehigh in 1971.

He was also passionate about bringing the work of psychologists from around the world to the attention of an English-speaking audience. To that end, he translated many works originally published in Dutch, French, Czech, Spanish, and Russian. He visited and conducted archival research in many countries, including Holland, Bohemia, Hungary, Italy, Croatia, and Slovenia. His last work, published just a few months before his death, was an examination of psychology in Brazil.

“My first major contact with him was in a graduate seminar that he taught here at Lehigh on the history of physiological psychology,” Shortess recalls. “Professionally, he not only maintained his early interest in the physiological basis of behavior, but developed an expertise in the history of psychology, particularly in Eastern Europe.” He was also the co-author or editor of numerous books, including the *Origins of Psychometry* (1970) and *Psychology in the U.S.S.R: A Historical Perspective*. Over the course of his career, he published more than 160 books and articles. His personal library, part of which is

located in Linderman Library, contains one of the most extensive collections anywhere of books and journals of psychology and physiology published in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Shortess says that he and his wife maintained a long-standing, cordial relationship with Brozek and his wife, Eunice, who studied psychiatric social work at the University of Minnesota before marrying Brozek in 1945.

“My wife and I were guests in their home on a number of occasions, where they hosted lively, informal discussions on a wide range of topics,” Shortess says. “We shared special interests in arts and travel, and he was particularly supportive when I arranged for a young Czech composer to come to Lehigh. He had a great love of music and of his native Czech Republic.

Eunice preceded Brozek in death in December 2002. The couple is survived by two children, Margaret Caliandro and Peter Brozek; and three grandchildren.

[--Linda Harbrecht](#)

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