A Tribute to Professor Henry Horwitz

Returning to Schaeffer Hall after nearly a quarter century’s absence makes me feel like Rip Van Winkle awakening from his long sleep! Where are the wooden floors, the high-ceilinged, non-air-conditioned classrooms, the smoke-filled hallways, the coffee-stained TA tables, the typewriters and the spirit master duplicating machines? The recently redesigned History Department suite is a stunningly beautiful, more efficient but alien environment for me.

Yet there are still some familiar faces here! Mary Strotman continues to manage the office with calm efficiency. Professor Jeffery Cox continues to blend wit and wisdom in teaching British History in his effervescent manner. Professor Sarah Hanley, apt proof of the theory of relativity because she looks younger to me now that I am 53 than she did when I was 28, is the department’s senior, much-published French historian. And of course, there is Professor Henry Horwitz, whom we all have gathered to honor.

This afternoon I would like to recall three snapshots in time that Professor Horwitz and I shared in a former life. The first took place on a warm, sunny, spring day in 1979 when he and his young daughter joined our history grad picnic. After feasting on the potluck spread out before us, Henry put on his tennis shoes and joined in our raucous afternoon volleyball game, coaching his young daughter in the finer points of winning as he did so. It was delightful to see this eminent scholar whom I viewed with awe showing such good-natured sportsmanship in the park.

The second snapshot occurred in Henry’s private office one morning as he and I discussed my progress in his Readings in Early Modern Europe class. Having been educated all my life in private, church-sponsored schools, I felt very insecure here at the
University of Iowa. But with Henry’s kind, clear, encouraging counsel that day, I rose to
the challenge he presented and wrote a 20-page paper on “The Dutch Republic and the
Seventeenth Century Crisis”—several copies of which were run off by Mary Strottmann
on the spirit master duplicator! I still have that paper, Henry, and last week I reread it
with a sense of satisfaction at what you helped me accomplish in your very demanding
course. Five published books and some 75 articles later, I want to thank you for the high
standards you set for me in your class.

The third snapshot comes from old Schaeffer Hall Room 208 where you and
Herman Rebel team-taught the course Readings in Early Modern Europe during the
spring semester of 1979. To the utter amazement and amusement of us 15 grad students,
you and Herman would frequently engage in heated arguments over disputed points of
history! For any naïve students searching for “the party line” in the course, you and
Herman aptly modeled how history is often composed of conflicting interpretations and
sometimes the best way to arrive at truth is to argue its ramifications in front of your
students. My 32 pages of carefully outlined notes demonstrate that we covered an
amazing amount of historiographic territory in that class! As Professor Spitzer used to
describe it, we were étudiants sérieux, a salon of scholars together enjoying the rarified
atmosphere you created for us. If there truly were a time travel machine back to the past,
I would rejoin your class in a heartbeat, Henry!

I applaud you not only for your distinguished teaching career and outstanding
scholarship, but also for your encouragement when I sat in your classes. May God richly
bless you in your retirement that your days may be lengthened and your joys increased!

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