

Imanuel Wexler: Remembrances

Francis Ahking asked me—Steve Miller—to write a tribute to our dear friend and colleague, Imanuel Wexler. I also asked several of his emeritus colleagues—Peter Barth, Alpha Chang, Dennis Heffley, Will McEachern, Steve Sacks, and Polly Allen—to contribute their thoughts. I hope that you can sort out who said what below.

I first met Imanuel during my interview trip to UConn. He was tasked with picking me up at Bradley Airport and taking me to Storrs. You may know Imanuel was one who liked a good conversation. Moreover, when he talked with you, he naturally looked at you. The ride back to Storrs was exciting as he carried on most of the conversation as I prayed that we arrived safely. We did.

Imanuel came to the United States from Israel in the early 1950s to attend LSU as an undergraduate student studying history. He went to graduate school at Harvard where he received his PhD. While at Harvard he was a GA for Wassily Leontief, working on Leontief's input output model. UConn was his first position, working initially at the Hartford campus before moving to the Storrs campus.

Will McEachern relates how he and Pat first met Imanuel. "I first met Imanuel in late August of 1973, when Pat and I stopped by Monteith to drop off some books. We had parked in front of Monteith (the semester had not started so parking was available) and were in the process of unloading, when Imanuel, who I later learned was drawn to any activity, approached and asked if he could help. Of course, by that time I had done my homework and was acquainted with all Department members. Pat and I were most impressed that this international textbook author and Marshall Plan scholar would talk with us in such a casual and easy way. He made us both feel welcomed."

Will continues, "Later, after I learned that one of his Ph.D. advisees, Mark Bender, taught me econometrics at Holy Cross, I came to refer to Imanuel as Grandfather and he called me Grandson. Though we were separated by only 13 years, those terms of affection seemed to fit and stuck, even recently."

Will adds, "Over the years, I chatted with Imanuel thousands of time, usually in his office and often about nothing in particular. He was a great sounding board and straight man. He offered a ready laugh. He would introduce a new topic with "Listen..." This at times seemed to give him time to actually come up with that new topic to keep the pot boiling. These were his smoking days, but he always tried to limit the second-hand smoke with an open window."

Will concludes, "The Department was lucky to have this product of LSU and Harvard. We have all lost a cherished colleague. Rest in peace, Grandfather."

Peter Barth reflected on his conversations with Imanuel over the years. "In the many years that I knew Imanuel I can honestly say that there were virtually none that didn't include his saying,

‘Peter, I’m sure that you remember that...’. Many times in a single conversation several sentences were begun that way. There were times I wondered if he was simply testing my recall ability as the distant and obscure point could not have been remembered by anyone—other than Imanuel. As I grew older pride forced me to say that I did remember the incident or comment said and he never challenged me when I nodded indicating that I did remember. Another sign, possibly, of his kind nature.”

Dennis Heffley tells us about Imanuel the lawbreaker. “Everyone who knew Imanuel was familiar with his warmth, kindness, and uncanny memory, but I also caught a glimpse of Imanuel the “lawbreaker”. I went into the department one weekend after finals. This was back in the days when smoking bans were being introduced to academic buildings. I was a non-smoker and unaffected by the ban, but Imanuel was a smoker. As I walked down the hallway in Monteith past the seminar room, I glanced through the window in the door. There sat Imanuel, grading his final exams, with a cigarette in his mouth, so I thought I’d kid him a bit. I opened the door and jokingly said ‘Imanuel, don’t you know you can’t smoke anymore in this room?’ Imanuel smiled and pointed to the ‘no-smoking’ sign above the door, which he had meticulously covered up with a blank sheet of paper taped over the sign. We both had a good laugh.”

Dennis finishes, “Imanuel was a wonderful colleague and friend—we will miss him dearly.”

Alpha Chiang refers to Imanuel’s wide circle of acquaintances. “Imanuel seemed to know everybody on campus. When we walked together to the Faculty Center for lunch, he would say hello to seemingly a hundred people, leaving me feeling like a nobody. In my ‘roasting’ speech at his retirement party, I referred to this fact as his ‘Salutation Syndrome.’”

At the time that he and I met, Imanuel’s international text was recently published. A few years later, Imanuel revealed to me a ‘secret’ that he included in his text. He borrowed the tradition embodied in Psalm 119, which started each new series of verses with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet sequentially from the first to the last. Imanuel remarked that sometimes the first sentence, which is always difficult to write, was especially difficult to draft given the letter restriction on the first word.

Alpha remarks “Imanuel and I became good friends the very day I joined the UConn faculty in 1964. Not only because he was a congenial and likable fellow, but also because both of us were working on our respective books, and we shared the common writers’ agony. We discussed each other’s problems, and jokingly referred to ourselves as “fellow book-makers.” Many people do not know it, but Imanuel did not type. He wrote his book long hand with a pencil, making his manuscript a true *manuscript*. I, on the other hand, wrote my book on an electric typewriter, the IBM Selectric, at that time the state-of-the-art writing instrument.”

I note that Imanuel’s *magnum opus* was the book on the economic history of the Marshall Plan (*The Marshall Plan Revisited: The European Recovery Program in Economic Perspective*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983). During and after the writing of this book Imanuel also

made presentations at several conferences as well as several articles leading up the 50th anniversary of the Marshall Plan. Imanuel generally did not enlist coauthors in his writings. But he altered his policy for me and he and I actually published a paper and rejoinder to a comment on the original paper in 1975 and 1976.

Steve Sacks adds a story about Imanuel's commitment to his students and teaching. Steve remarks, "Many of us remember how warm and welcoming Imanuel was when we first arrived in Storrs, so I have nothing special to relate about my arrival at UConn. What I do want to tell you about was a discussion in the mailroom many years later. Imanuel and Alpha were discussing Alpha's and Imanuel's decisions regarding when to retire. Alpha tried to convince Imanuel that, given the details of the health insurance promised at that moment and the uncertainty of what would be available a year later, the optimal strategy was to retire now. Imanuel, however, felt that those arguments were outweighed by his desire to teach International Trade (?) one more time. For him his teaching trumped (pardon my word choice) the few dollars that might be foregone. He really wanted to try out some ideas for improving that course."

Polly Allen relates "Imanuel was the first person I met in the economics department. In 1975 I came to Storrs for a job interview. Imanuel and I both worked in international economics, so he was the logical choice to meet me at the airport. That was the start of long and dear friendship."

Polly, continues, "Imanuel had a prodigious memory for the small details that many of us hardly even register. A few years ago he and I were reminiscing about that first meeting. I was quite surprised when Imanuel told me he remembered what I had worn that day. I certainly did not, but his description sounded about right and was probably accurate."

Polly also notes, "With our common interests, Imanuel and I had many occasions to work together, and we became good friends. Our friendship deepened after he retired. Betty and Imanuel lived just around the corner from me. Imanuel would come and check on my house when I was out of town, and I watered their garden if they were away—a rather uneven trade, as I was absent far more than were Imanuel and Betty."

Polly concludes, "My current husband, Gene, and I became close friends of both Betty and Imanuel over the last 13 years. Gene told me if he were able to choose his father, it would be Imanuel. Imanuel was one of the kindest, most generous people I have known. Although I have not lived in Storrs for over a year, Imanuel's absence leaves a hole in my life."

Another of Imanuel's accomplishments was paving the way for an overseas studies program on European integration at Tilburg University and latter at Maastricht University. This program was headed by a UConn Economics professor who led 15 to 20 students to a program that involved course on the economics of European integration, the politics of European integrations, a series of company visits, and a course taught by the UConn faculty member. Imanuel was the first

resident director of the program and continued his involvement in the program by recruiting resident directors and providing coaching on how the program worked.

Alpha and I were also drawn into the Netherlands program. Alpha notes “Another aspect of his personality was his ‘Holland Obsession.’ He once took a group of UConn students to Holland for our Study Abroad Program. That country impressed him so much that, after his return, he could not speak more than two or three sentences without mentioning Holland at least once. For the auditory protection of our colleagues, I felt obliged to proclaim a ‘Chiang Rule,’ to the effect that nobody is allowed to mention ‘Holland’ within a hundred yards of the Department of Economics at UConn. To his credit, he conscientiously observed my rule, using the alternative expression “that country” instead – but often.”

Alpha continues, “When the Study Abroad Program reached its fifth year, Imanuel suggested that all of the colleagues who had participated in that program (including Steve Miller, and myself) should go to the Netherlands for a celebration – a ‘Jubilee’ as he called it. When Betty, Imanuel’s wife, heard the mention of ‘Jubilee’ for the fifth anniversary, she responded with a serious tone, ‘Why do you want to celebrate a Five-year Jubilee? Just wait another five years, then you can celebrate a Ten-year Centennial!’ That was the funniest thing I recall about Imanuel.”

Alpha ends, “Immanuel, my good friend, farewell, and may you rest in peace.”

When I retired in 2001 and moved to Las Vegas, Imanuel insisted that we stay in touch, not by email, not by phone, but by handwritten letters. So, for the past 19 years, we exchanged handwritten letters every month or so. Imanuel had to put up with my terrible handwriting. His was flawless. We continued until his most recent illness where the pain in his hand prevented him from handwritten communication and, thus, we continued to communicate by telephone.

Steve Miller
Las Vegas
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