

FAREWELL TO IRV

It is with deepest sadness that I say farewell to Irving, my final farewell to my brother, my mentor, my friend, my colleague.

Ours has been a very special relationship, from the moment that I became conscious of his presence as my brother, about 80 years ago. Even from the time when I was a child, I recall vividly his caring, gentle, soft-spoken manner: he was always protective of his younger brother.

All who have had the privilege of knowing Irving will recall that he was endowed with superior intelligence, curiosity, and firm convictions. He was, too, among the most handsome persons I have ever known, as a boy and as a man, with a soft, endearing smile.

Irving's talent was evident throughout his studies. He completed high school at 16, with very high marks. He began his B. A. at the highly-esteemed University of Chicago, then as later a world-class center of economics. In the summer of 1940, during a visit to Montreal, he experienced a personal turning point – he met Toba! The rest is history: they were married in 1944, and had a happy marriage for more than 62 years.

Irving transferred to McGill, graduating with first class honours in economics in 1943. While still an undergraduate student, in 1942, at 19, he received a prestigious national award for the most outstanding essay on “Post-War Reconstruction in Canada”, an early indicator of his intellectual talent. He also worked as a research assistant at the International Labour Organization, the ILO, which had moved from Geneva to Montreal early in the Second World War to escape from the turmoil that then pervaded Europe.

In 1943, he began his graduate studies at Harvard, then and ever since, another great center of economics. However, after his first term, Irv's sense of duty and commitment led him to suspend his studies and join the RCAF, in which he served as a Pilot Officer until the end of World War II. He returned to Harvard, with Toba, in 1945 to complete his studies. He received an M.A. in 1947 and a Ph. D in 1951. At both Chicago and Harvard he encountered some of the greatest economists of the twentieth century, including Jacob Viner, Joseph Schumpeter and Alvin Hansen.

While still a graduate student, in 1948, Irving began his formal academic career, as an Assistant Professor of Economics at McGill, one of the youngest ever to hold such a position: he was 25. Two years later, always in search of knowledge and a broader disciplinary framework for teaching and scholarship, Irving and Toba, with little Rick and Tom, went to the Yale Law School, one of the most illustrious in the world.

This was one of the many occasions where our academic paths coincided. I was a graduate student at Yale at the time; and we both received our degrees the same day, in June 1953, Irving, his LL. B, and I a Ph. D in International Relations. Our entire family gathered in New Haven to celebrate this double event.

Farewell to Irv -2-

Irving then moved on to another educational experience, as Assistant Professor of Economics and Lecturer in Law at Northwestern University, 1953-55, and then served as a Staff Member of the Royal Commission on Canada's Economic Prospects for two years. He returned to McGill, in 1957 and, for almost three decades thereafter he and I continued to interact intensely – I had joined the faculty in 1952, and we were members of the same Department, Economics and Political Science. So close was this relationship that we found ourselves in a unique situation in which, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Brecher brothers shared an office in the then home of this Department, Purvis Hall. It is difficult to imagine a closer academic relationship.

During those early years, but also later, Irv was not only my academic colleague; he was also my mentor, advising on research projects, on writing style, on methods. He never tried to impose his views; rather, they always took the form of suggestions, proposals, and comments. They were always carefully considered and wise; and often, though not always, I accepted his advice, to my great benefit.

Some who have gathered here today to pay their respects may not know of Irving's academic contributions. He rose to the rank of Full Professor at McGill in 1962, before he was 40, a most uncommon event in our generation of university teachers. The next year, he founded the McGill Centre for Developing-Area Studies, the CDAS, the premier research institute in Canada on the Third World – Asia, Africa and Latin America – during Irving's long period as Director, until 1971. Earlier, he served as the Joint Director of the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, and Irving, Toba, Rick, Tom and young Ron spent a year in Karachi. In the early 1970s, Irving served as Vice-Chair of the Economic Council of Canada, the most influential 'think tank' in Ottawa on Canada's economic policy.

During the early 1980s, he was Chairman of the McGill Department of Economics during a period of turmoil. His wise leadership and counsel helped to bring about reconciliation among conflicting members and factions within the Department. Since 1985, he was an Emeritus Professor of Economics at McGill. And in the late 1980s, he was one of the originators of what became the high-profile Government of Canada-sponsored International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, now known as 'Rights and Democracy'; Irving was a member of its Executive Committee and was its Research Director.

For many years, these values, especially individual rights and democracy everywhere, were the highest values for Irving. Their promotion became a relentless goal for the rest of his life.

Irving was a prolific author, of books on 'Monetary and Fiscal Thought and Policy in Canada, 1919-39', 'Canada-United States Economic Relations' (with Simon Riesman), 'Foreign Aid and Industrial Development in Pakistan', among others, and many articles in learned journals on economics, law, and public policy. And, during his post-McGill retirement years, Irving contributed a steady

Farewell to Irv -3-

flow of powerfully-argued and lucid articles in leading Canadian newspapers on a wide range of domestic and foreign policy issues. His was a career of academic achievement in many fields.

Over the decades, I have had the pleasure of knowing Irving's family well. He was a loving and caring husband, father, grandfather and brother, and a favourite uncle of many nieces and nephews. He was deeply involved in the professional activities, and visibly proud of the achievements, of Rick, Tom, Ron and Terry in their varied careers – to the very end. This became evident to me once more the day after I arrived from Jerusalem to say farewell, my final farewell, to Irv.

It was a day I will always remember. When I entered his hospital room, he greeted me with his endearing smile: 'Mike, Mike, you have come to see me; how thoughtful of you'. He grasped my arm firmly and was visibly moved, as I was during a four-hour visit.

Irving's conversation with Ron and me was animated, his curiosity evident, as always. So too was his innate optimism, which he expressed again even as he lay in the hospital, knowing that the end was near. Ron asked his father whether he would like Ron to read parts of the newspaper to him. Irv replied, softly, "just the headlines, Ron". The lead headline that day was about pending negotiations between the two warring Palestinian factions, Fatah and Hamas, with Saudi Arabia as the mediator. "Very good news", said Irving, his pain and discomfort notwithstanding. Then he turned to me, who he knew was deeply involved in the Arab-Israel conflict, and said, in all seriousness: "yes, Mike, I am still optimistic; they will succeed in 5-10 years."

Rick phoned, and Irv had an animated conversation with him for several minutes. One sentence caught my attention – Ron and I were in Irving's hospital room at the time: "you must finish that article and send it off to the journal", he said to Rick, with obvious feeling.

The most unforgettable remark by Irving that day, demonstrating his courage in the face of the most profound personal adversity, were his words to Ron and me: the doctors, with Ron's support, were trying to persuade Irving to do another X-Ray so that they could then do a procedure that would reduce the severe pain from which he was then suffering; Irv refused, firmly, and he said, with obvious awareness of its meaning: "all I want is to be allowed to die quietly and to rest in peace". It was a farewell statement of a person for whom dignity and courage were very high values.

I remember too Irving's moving eulogy to Eva, my beloved wife, at the memorial service on Mount Royal a little more than two years ago; his sensitive words about his sister-in-law resonated then and will do so forever.

Irving touched the minds and hearts of all who encountered and knew him over the decades – family, friends, students and colleagues, none more than Eva and

Farewell to Irv -4-

me. He had an enormous impact on all who were fortunate to know him, and he left the world a much better place than when he entered it. He lived a life that mattered, that made a profound difference in the personal and professional realms; and that, in the end, is further evidence of a life well lived.

I salute my brother for his many virtues and qualities and for the privilege of his friendship since our childhood.

Our daughters, Leora, Seegla, and Diana, who is representing my family here today, were especially fond of Uncle Irving and asked me to say that they share my personal sentiments about a deep personal loss.

This is a very sad day, the end of a life that was very meaningful to me, among many others; it is a time of grief.

In concluding my reminiscences about my brother, Irving, I feel compelled to express two final thoughts. To experience a profound personal loss twice in two years is more than one can bear. As on that earlier occasion, the passing of my wife, Eva, I have but one hope as I say my final farewell to Irv: may you rest in peace, free from pain forever.

Mike 2 Febuary 2007