

[Carmichael, James V.](#) “Memorial Tribute to Edward G. Holley,” Garrard Hall, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, June 12, 2010

I represent some of Ed Holley’s students, those that occupied part of his waking hours from 1982 to 1988 and became something less than his biological children but something more than those who encountered him only in class. My clearest memory of him is at the end of my ten-minute doctoral defense when, having only covered about thirty years out of a possible seventy year time span in my study, he looked up and said, “Jim, can we finish this up now?” He made me well aware of my tendency to logorrhea, a ten dollar word probably only used by doctoral students, the meaning of which recalls one of Gens’ favorite expressions of his father’s, that just because a body knows something doesn’t mean that he always needs to be telling it. In honor of my education under Dr. Holley, I will be brief.

My hilarious Holley stories—and there were more than a few— were told at Dr. Holley’s retirement and that was a couple of decades ago. What I want to remember today was what Dr. Holley brought to the School of Information and Library Science. While I’ve heard the faculty under Dr. Holley described as “humanities” scholars, that statement is not, strictly speaking, true. Most of the faculty members, including Dr. Holley, were social scientists with finely developed narrative skills and a penchant for *le mot juste*. I’ve also heard him described as a “book” rather than an “information” man, but that also sets up a false dichotomy. In fact, Dr. Holley did teach History of the Book and once lectured his church congregation, which heretofore had only consulted the King James Bible, on the history of the English Bible in order that they adapt a more flexible attitude towards the problems of translation and higher criticism generally, he was not hostile at all to the possibilities of electronic information. Actually, he was a “people” man, and therein laid his considerable talents.

Long before Chapel Hill’s SILS program became officially “number one” on one of many rating scales we students were taught to mistrust in Research Methodology class, I was drawn to it by those smiling faculty faces in the school’s brochure. I was only disappointed slightly to learn later that Marilyn Miller wasn’t a direct descendant of the vaudeville star who had introduced the song “Look for the Silver Lining” to Broadway—obviously not, since I followed her after graduating in 1988 to Greensboro, where I have taught ever since. Lester Asheim, Bob Broadus, Haynes McMullen, Barbara Moran, Susan Steinfirst, Fred Roper, Mary Kingsbury, Martin Dillon, Ray Carpenter, Budd Gambee, Mildred Downing—if he did not personally hire all of them, he seemed to treasure their contributions to the program. Not to forget, he had to ride herd over all of them in faculty meetings where opinions were prolifically varied.

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My classmate John Budd stated better than anyone the qualities that endeared him to us: “He’s an excellent scholar, academic librarian, and administrator; husband and father—and he’s a nice guy, too!” To which I can only add: and he made it all so much fun! He would be the first to reject sainthood, yet he was, as Irene Owens says repeatedly, something like a saint to us in that he never seemed too busy to help us, either by introducing us to other venerable worthies who could answer our questions, listening calmly to our woes, gently but firmly suggesting editorial changes, or just doing the right thing: hiring the right person, saying what needed to be said, defusing a tense conversation with a sally.

For all his gentlemanly modesty, he was no fool, either. Marilyn Miller often refers to his comment when he received one of his many lifetime achievement awards in the 1980’s: “I’m not sure what this is for—but I’ll take it!” He wasn’t unlike my own father who had been gone a decade when I met Ed Holly, and I never cease to be grateful that I had the chance to steadily improve under his mentorship in ways I could never demonstrate to my father.

In my mind, he is telling me that I have said enough. So for generations of doctoral students, thank you, Ed, for the good of the order.

June 12, 2010