

# CELEBRATING L. EARL SHAW

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## **1. Friendship**

Earl Shaw was my best friend in the Minnesota Political Science Department.

That doesn't distinguish me from anyone in this room. And it doesn't help me decide what to say, since I now realize that the things you talk about only with your best friend are things that shouldn't be repeated anyway.

But it meant I always had someone who believed in me.

All I really needed every morning was that hale and hearty "Hello!" that would last the day, or at least till coke time.

## **2. Teaching**

The most important thing to say about Earl Shaw is that he was a stellar teacher. Earl had a special breadth. We had hired him principally to offer American political theory. He did that, as well as graduate-level normative and empirical theory, which is everything else. He asked to teach introductory American government, which we think is intrinsically the hardest, because he had to keep up on every subfield. He then did the Congress part of the President-Congress-Courts upper division sequence.

He excelled in teaching all of them. At the end of each semester, students fill out a detailed rating form. I pulled summaries from several classes at random, and they all ranged high. We also ask how the teacher had done in comparison to other teachers at the University. We had a 7-point scale, and usually combined the top two scores – 6s and 7s, or "very good" and "unusually good." More than 60 percent of Shaw's students typically rated him in this way.

The nomination Earl got for Best Teacher is not in our Department's files. Maybe the file just wasn't returned after Earl's selection. The letters in that file from former students in his classes would provide the best description of what went on. But I suspect his class was like his conversation, like a typical, rewarding interaction with him.

Earl was a guy for whom liberal arts worked. By that I mean he knew enough of most areas to know how they all fit together. He used this perspective

every day to evaluate what was new each day. Then, what is far more unusual, instead of a narrowing of focus, Earl integrated the new with the old.

I have said that the occupational disease of a teacher is that we tell people more than they want to know about anything. While I am reminded frequently that I have a bad case of that disease, I knew Earl didn't since his students would keep returning for more. But he came close early on regarding Reinhold Niebuhr, the subject of his dissertation. I wonder why we didn't set him up for hazing when he finally finished his degree, something like a new game where we would seat him in a chair, encircled by a dozen of us colleagues, and each of us would call out a word or a phrase, and Earl would have ten seconds to give a sentence of Niebuhr that pertained to that word. I bet he would have nailed it each time.

As to his teaching style, he paid attention to everything that was happening in the world of politics and policy. Not simple factoids or anecdotes, but taking each item and immediately generating the theoretical point about why it was happening in the way it was. Besides, it seemed that each item was funny. Each was humorous – not witty, maybe farcical, likely ironic, often preposterous. It was fun to find out about each item from the view of Earl, and the laughter helped keep one's sanity in a crazy world.

Earl's learnings were always these triads – the acute observation, the analysis, and the humor.

Of course on humorous politicians, Earl had a head start, being from North Carolina, the state that elected Jesse Helms to the U.S. Senate. Earl Shaw was on the ground for the Helms/Hunt North Carolina U.S. Senate race in 1984. He would figure out what he needed to know, and then just then set out to get it. Example: once he sat all day in a dark hall outside an office labeled Independent Committee for Helms – an unlimited spending body that legally had to have no connection to the limited spending actual campaign. No one came or left the office all day, perhaps because a sign on the door directing anybody that needed to contact them should go up one floor to the official Helms reelection committee.

Earl was fascinated with the political process enough to think seriously about running for Congress.

For some reason, the local Arizona pols in his new neighborhood were more interested in him the less likely it was that the district would go Democrat. Outsiders are always welcome to run an impossible race.

This can be some sort of assurance for you, the loving bereaved family, that Earl won't be forgotten while those who knew him live. We will continue to mark news items for him to see, thinking we will hear that burst of laughter.

### **3. Teaching Award**

Earl received two major awards for his teaching. The first was in 1972, the College of Liberal Arts Distinguished Teacher Award, and the second, in 1986, was the University Student Alumni Association Citation of Merit in Recognition of Distinguished Service to Students.

There is a kind of price you pay being one of the first people to win an award. They just tell you you've won. As the years go by the award is institutionalized. Earl didn't get a plaque or even a certificate. When the time came for Earl's departure from the University to Northern Arizona, I mentioned this omission to John Turner on whose lawn we had the going-away party. John used his usual set of administrative crowbars, pried a certificate out from somewhere, and had it mounted it on a plaque. Earl probably would rather have the money the winners now get. It sounds like the key to Fort Knox.

I attended the Best Teacher Award ceremonies last week because Department colleagues August Nimtz and John Sullivan were getting them. (Actually it was a three-fer because Bud Duvall, who had won the Graduate award the year before, was the chair of the selections committees and presented the candidates.)

The printed program bragged that 277 professors now have received the Best Teacher award. But the list of winners did not include Earl Shaw or Hal Chase, another early winner from our Department. The nearest I could figure was that Hal and Earl had received the award sponsored by the College of Liberal Arts only. The present awards are university-wide.

In my usual careful way, I plunged ahead with letters to the Senate Honors Committee. When Chair Freeman called to invite me to make this talk, I mentioned incidentally to him the new problem. He tried to seem somewhat pleased to be informed that the Department's agenda was being pursued without his knowing about it.

### **4. TV**

Once a professor at Wisconsin told me that my adviser, Ralph Huitt, would never be famous in his field because in the evening he just wanted to watch TV and play with his kids. That was indeed a priority he had chosen. (And Huitt became famous anyway.)

As to the TV, Earl was an unabashed fan, too.

When CNN was new, it broadcast the U.S. House gavel-to-gavel. Earl was addicted. I was sympathetic because I reacted the same way when I got the American Political Science Association's Congressional Fellowship. I was in the Gallery every moment I could create. This is the only way to learn parliamentary procedure and strategy – immersion. If you are not bored, it shows you don't really know what's really going on. Earl got that from his ongoing dosage of CNN.

And Earl liked feature films on TV. But this time cannot be charged to entertainment, because for Earl it was a part of his work. He even developed a class called "Images of Politics in the American Film." It was offered in summer to get more flexible time for watching, and was always oversubscribed.

### **5. Family**

Earl never let his work detract from his family time. Last year I was looking for an old family photo, and came across some pictures of a Department fall welcome picnic. There was a picture where kids' table held three little Shaw girls (the fourth was on the way?) all dressed in red so they could easily be watched over in a crowd. My wife and I had four children also. When I see large families in the grocery store I wonder how we did it. And that was nothing compared to what the Shaws pulled off – raising four while getting Betty through law school. I am sure we couldn't have done that. That is truly impossible, but the Shaws found a way to do it.

Rivaling those years is the Shaw's wedding business. We attended 75 percent of the Shaw girls' weddings, and believe me, they were impressive. Earl told me how he had mastered the wedding matters. He said he never gave a single thought to anything about them, and they always turned out perfect.

### **6. Religion**

Besides his political science, Earl was a graduate of the Yale divinity school. As you have heard, Earl was a staunch member here in this church, University Baptist. Like every great world religion, and like every Protestant denomination, the churches are

internally divided on many possible fault lines of theology. Earl demonstrated that though conservative theology and conservative social policy factions are strong, Christianity does not require you to check either your mind or your heart at the door. Earl had me here a couple of times to address the challenging Forum group on the role of political parties. It takes some courage to be out of the vestry as a man of faith in the academic community.

On a personal note, I always found it handy to have a chaplain in the Department. I'd pop in and say "Whenever you're making parish calls, put me on the list." The answer was usually "now."

### **7. Athletics**

Earl loved sports. He was so proud of Wake Forest and UNC, who almost always had respectable teams in many sports. He certainly never found a need to transfer his loyalty to the Gophers.

I was talking to Chuck Walcott the other day – we always thought of Chuck and Earl as our Minnesota twins – and Chuck said the last big time he spent with Earl was when the American Political Science Association held their convention in Boston. Chuck and Earl went to a Red Sox game in Fenway Park, fulfilling a boyhood dream of Earl's. Just as they arrived, a tremendous cloudburst came. The start of the game kept getting postponed. After a half hour, Chuck turned to Earl and said, "You went to Yale divinity school. Now's your chance to see if you can get some divine intervention so they don't call the game." A few minutes later, the rain suddenly stopped and the knothole boys watched a long and beautifully played game.

Chuck was able to attend Earl's service in Chapel Hill last Sunday. But Chuck told me that when he heard later that Red Sox pitcher Derek Lowe had pitched a no-hitter, Chuck expected that Earl was probably no in the church with the mourners, but in Fenway Park that afternoon.

### **8. Salude!**

I mentioned that I had attended the Best Teachers award ceremony. I was impressed by what I heard, and wished we could get the state legislators to read the short bios on these people, Earl among them. They would never again use that "black hole" analogy where they toss the U big bucks and can't ever see any results.

It was only later that I realized I myself was reacting naively to the summaries as though they were a single cross-section of the awarded person's life. I was missing the time dimension. That is, each of these profs would be leaving the ceremony, only to meet with their class three or four times next week. Most of them taught one or two other courses the same semester, too. Then there's next semester, and next year. Earl Shaw did these sessions 22 years here and another 14 at Northern Arizona. What a colossal load of learnings went across his lectern during his career. I now see the dynamics of the movement of understanding that took place over his whole career. This Best Teacher award is not a hero's medal for one moment of bravery. It's an avalanche that keeps on sweeping past.

So we want to celebrate Earl's whole academic life poured out for us.

Earl did a lot of celebrating. He was the caseworker for my Tate advising award. After I had won, I invited Earl and Betty to go to Murray's restaurant to celebrate by sharing a side of beef. But one time here at school we ventured to the Best Steak House on the bridge in Dinkytown and enjoyed the celebration of being together in an important effort just as much.

Thank you, Earl, for making this Department an even better place – better for learning and better for collegiality.

Hail and farewell, Friend!