

Closing Banquet Eulogies



David Lay



John Roe

Tribute to David Lay (Prepared by Russell Howell)

Being asked to eulogize our good friend David Lay is a high honor for me. Because Indiana Wesleyan University has roots in the Wesleyan tradition, it seems appropriate to begin with a well-known quote from John Wesley. Those who knew David would agree that he lived by the following dictum:

Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can,
At all the times you can,
To all the people you can,
As long as ever you can.

Focusing on those phrases makes their application to David easy to see:

Do all the good you can by all the means you can

Like many of you I first met David at an ACMS meeting, and was instantly drawn to him because of his affable nature and welcoming spirit. Sometime in 1998 he phoned me out of the blue stating that he was one of the lottery winners for a free room at the Joint Mathematics Meetings in San Antonio. Many people, I suppose, would have taken that opportunity to enjoy a room by themselves, but David invited me to share in his reward. Indeed, whenever he had the means and opportunity David was always thinking of the other.

If you teach at a Christian institution you may have received a note similar to the one Westmont got. It said, “The Lord Jesus has blessed the sales of my Linear Algebra book. Please use the enclosed check in whatever means will best further your program.” The check was very generous, and receiving such a gift by an author is an extraordinary event. But of course, David was an extraordinary person.

In all the ways you can

One way of doing good is to do your job well. David was an excellent teacher, having won Maryland’s Distinguished Scholar-Teacher award in 1997. We all know him as the author of a leading Linear Algebra book, but we might not know of some of the stories behind it. Have you noticed his dedication? It reads, “To my wife, Lillian, and our children, Christina, Deborah, and Melissa, whose support, encouragement, and faithful prayers made this book possible.” More than most any

one I knew, David sought to bear witness to his Lord and savior. His good work earned the respect of everyone who knew him, which resulted in his having a special platform in promoting Christian perspectives. In an earlier edition of his book David wanted a picture of a family walking in a park. The page proofs came back with two women and a young boy. He objected. His publisher gave a lame reason for making the change. David insisted that he wanted to depict a family, and that he wouldn't agree to publishing if the picture wasn't changed back. The publisher relented of course. After all, David's good work had translated into healthy profits for them.

In all the places you can

I was fortunate enough to spend a semester teaching a course in complex analysis at the University of Maryland beginning in January of 2000. David went out of his way to roll out the welcome mat. Sometime early on he and Lillian invited Kay and me to celebrate their anniversary at a dinner theater. I suggested we split the bill, but he insisted on treating us—to *their* anniversary dinner—saying that this was a practice in which they regularly engaged.

And I observed firsthand the extraordinary commitment he had to his church, his teaching, and his family. He was a leader in organizing a weekly lunch group with other Christian faculty, and took delight in Christians doing scholarship in whatever field they were engaged.

As a faculty member David sought to serve rather than to be served, and was not at all concerned about status. I remember a discussion we had in which he expressed disappointment that the Maryland faculty were continually comparing themselves with Harvard, with nuanced language of plans for getting to that level. He then made a rhetorical comment that stuck with me: "Why do we always have to strive to be something we're not? Why can't we just be as good as possible given the situation in which God has placed us?"

At all the times you can to all the people you can

Students no doubt saw Christ's love through David. If, for whatever reason, I happened to leave the mathematics building late, David would often still be there. On one occasion he had deliberately waited until most faculty had gone home. He wanted to enter more helpful problems in Maryland's "Blackboard" web system. But during the day the system was too slow, so waiting until after normal business hours for that task made his time more efficient. This commitment to teaching left an impact on young people that cannot be overstated. Listen to an accolade given to him by Chris Beach, one of his former students. I found it on web page setup by his family in conjunction with the Schoedinger Funeral Parlor: "He made Math exciting for me and when I asked for help, he was always there for me with a smile and encouraging voice . . . I just wanted you to know that 26 years after he taught me, I still consider [him to be] the finest teacher I ever had."

I'm sure that comment represents just a tiny tip of the iceberg of all tributes that could be collected from former students. And the fact that we are having this time of reflection speaks well of the impact he had on many of us.

As long as ever you can

Until his final breath, David exhibited the fruit of the Spirit. I continue to be inspired by his work ethic, his brilliance, his humility, his love for his family, and his dedication to God. His life reinforces for me the truth of Proverbs 22:29. "Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will stand before kings; He will not stand before obscure men." Let's take the skill that David exhibited in all his work as a model for us to emulate. But not for the purpose of standing before kings. Rather, for the hope of hearing from the King of kings words with which David has no doubt already been blessed: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

Tribute to David Lay

(Prepared by C. Ray Rosentrater)

It is my honor to be given this opportunity to say a few words in honor of our friend David Lay.

My association with David has two different threads: through the ACMS, and through his work in revitalizing Linear Algebra and his associated, best-selling Linear Algebra text.

A couple of decades ago, David, along with Gilbert Strang, David Strong, and others began a conversation on the way that Linear Algebra was being taught. This conversation continues to the present time. At the most recent joint mathematics meetings there were several large sessions on Linear Algebra pedagogy.

As part of this reform movement, David authored a Linear Algebra text. In David's view, most introductory texts spent about half of the semester on computational ideas and matrix manipulations. Then midway through the semester, more theoretical ideas and proofs were suddenly introduced. This left students disoriented and somewhat in shock. David wrote a text that gently introduces theory and proofs along with the computational ideas from the very beginning. Gradually, the number and level of the proofs increases as students develop the ability to handle more sophisticated ideas. This student-centric orientation is typical of David. (More on his concern for students anon.)

The text was a rousing success. David's contact at Pearson told me that he felt very fortunate to be associated with David's text. Only a few people get to be part of publishing such a successful text. David, himself, mused that his book was probably a more significant contribution to the discipline than all of his other professional papers put together.

But David did not view the book's success as his own accomplishment. He frequently expressed gratitude to his wife, Lillian, for her support as he worked on the text. And David told me that as he was writing the text and submitting it for publication, he often prayed and offered the work to God. During the process of negotiation for publication in particular, David felt lead to ask for an unusual contract: a lower royalty rate for typical sales, but if the book exceeded expectations, the royalty rate would be significantly higher than usual. Due to the book's success, David tapped into the higher rate earlier on. And these funds helped provide for David's care as dementia gradually overtook his mind and proceeds from the book continue to support his wife Lillian after his passing.

David not only offered the book to God as it was being written. He maintained the attitude that he was a steward of something that belonged to God. I offer three examples of the way that David put this attitude into practice.

First, David donated some of the royalty funds to Christian endeavors. The checks were accompanied by a letter acknowledging God's goodness in granting success to the book and conveying David's desire to use the proceeds to further God's kingdom.

Second, as one of the latter editions of the text was being written, the publisher wanted to include an image that David felt did not honor God. David fought with the publisher until the picture was replaced.

Finally, as dementia began to overtake David, he knew that responsibility for the text would pass to someone else. David's strong desire was that responsibility for the text would be handed to

another Christian. Unfortunately, David lost this battle as his contract specified that the publisher would select subsequent authors in the event that David stopped producing new editions.

My other association with David was through this organization, the ACMS. I particularly remember a Joint Mathematics Meeting in San Diego when we met at a nearby restaurant. (This was in the era when we met at the message boards and then walked as a group to a nearby restaurant.) David was our post-dinner speaker. In his talk, David spoke of his interactions with students, his concern for them, and his regular prayer for them. I was impressed by David's student orientation at an institution that did not place significant value on such things and where the number of students involved was much greater than many of us experience.

David served the ACMS as a board member and, even after he had served out his terms, he was instrumental in advancing ACMS. I remember David coming to a board meeting with a proposal that we change our meeting protocol at the Joint Meetings. He proposed that instead of meeting by the message board and walking to a restaurant, we should host an official banquet held in the meeting facilities. This would allow our ACMS gathering to appear in the conference schedule. David's proposal was approved. While, due to cost considerations, we have we subsequently switched from holding banquets to holding a reception with a speaker and multiple, smaller dinner gatherings at local restaurants, the exposure we have gained from being in the JMM program has resulted in greatly increased attendance at our JMM events. There is no possible way that we could meet at a local restaurant anymore. Thank you, David. You have provided a significant avenue for us to be salt and light in our mathematical community.

I strongly suspect that additional thanks are in order. Holding a banquet at the official venue is not cheap and would have been prohibitively expensive for a significant portion of our membership had it not been for an anonymous donor (or donors) who subsidized the banquets. I do not know, but I strongly suspect that David provided significant financial support for the banquets. This conclusion is strongly in alignment with David's proposal to initiate a JMM banquet, his other donations to support mathematics in a Christian setting, and the humble way in which he conducted his affairs. So, assuming that you contributed financially toward making the banquets possible, thank you, David.

To shift gears a bit, one of my earliest recollections of David is of him leading the conference choir. I don't recall him leading the choir many times, but he sang in subsequent conference choirs. He loved to sing God's praises. So it is fitting that at the end of his life when his mind was failing, one of the last points of connection he had with this world was a session of hymns. David, we will miss your voice. Farwell dear brother in Christ until we meet again around God's throne.

Tribute to John Roe (Prepared by James Sellers)

I am humbled at the opportunity to share some thoughts about my very good friend, John Roe, and I count it a privilege to do so. I am thankful to Liane and the extended family for this opportunity.

I first met John when I interviewed for my job here at Penn State in the summer of 2001. Just days after the interview, I received an email message from John. In it, he welcomed me to the department, and he did something that I didn't really expect as I returned to my alma mater—he openly and graciously invited me and my family to join him and his family for church services once we arrived in State College. At that moment, I sensed that John and I shared a special bond, as believers in Christ, and our journey as friends began.

John and I were very different from one another in many ways. He was raised in England, completing studies at Cambridge and Oxford, I grew up in the Deep South of the United States, and my academic career wasn't as impressive. He loved rock climbing while I am terrified of heights. He was an extremely healthy eater, I am most certainly not! He held to many liberal views, socially, politically, theologically, while I was much more conservative (at least at the time). He once told me that he was a zero-point Calvinist, a statement which I still don't completely understand (as someone who has followed a Calvinistic theology for most of my life). And yet, John single-handedly helped me to grow in so many ways, especially as he modeled for me what it looked like to be a caring husband and father, a mathematician, and a man of faith!

As many of you are aware, John was a mathematician of the highest caliber. He published numerous books and papers during his career. He was a prolific writer. I learned from John a great deal about completing research in mathematics - the drive to learn something new, the desire to do work that was worthwhile and to write in a clear, readable manner, the willingness to put in countless hours to complete a task.

But John was much more than a research mathematician. His worldview, which was heavily informed by his faith, demanded that he influence the department in broader ways. So while at PSU, John served in various administrative roles, first as associate chair of the department, and later as the chair. In the early years of my relationship with him, he worked diligently to develop a much-needed, semester-long graduate teaching assistant training program. This was essential for the professional development of our graduate students, many of whom spend five years in our department teaching a wide variety of courses which serve students throughout the university. John felt that it was essential that these new graduate students, whom he viewed as colleagues, learn how to teach, how to manage a classroom, how to give priority to teaching, and how to navigate the policies and procedures within a university in the US. He strove to pass on to them his passion and excitement for teaching. The program was a huge success, and was really a forerunner for similar programs which are now popping up around the country.

John was also very sensitive to the educational needs of all students at Penn State, not just the mathematics majors. So he spent significant time developing my department's "Math for Money" course some years ago, and in more recent years, he developed "Math for Sustainability" as well as a corresponding textbook for the course. (After all, there really wasn't a text suitable for such a course - so the right thing to do, in his mind, was to write one!). This project was extremely near and dear to John's heart; he was significantly burdened in the waning years of his life that this textbook come to fruition. Thankfully, within the last few months, this text was completed and is now published by Springer. It was, arguably, John's professional "last hurrah." He was sincerely

concerned about climate change, and convicted that we should be treating the creation with dignity and respect, and to serve as excellent stewards of the earth that we have inherited.

To be honest, John's "behind the scenes" work impressed me even more. I will never forget the day, during John's chairship, when he came to me shaken, broken, after he had to compassionately share with a fixed-term instructor that the department might not be able to renew her contract because of the significant financial struggles which the university was facing. He shed tears over his deliberations prior to this meeting; he didn't simply see such actions as "departmental administration;" he always understood that his decisions, his actions, his words, impacted *people*, people about whom he cared a great deal.

And in typically thorough fashion, John also took on the truly "base," non-glamorous task of developing a new system for course scheduling in my department. Motivated by his desire to see the department handle all of these details in a much more effective manner, and his love for programming and electronic gadgetry of all sorts, he single-handedly took it upon himself to develop (from scratch) a database app which kept track of every imaginable detail related to teaching in our department as well as providing a means to assign each member of our teaching corps to their courses each semester. And just for "fun," John wrote a user's guide and documentation for the program - its more than 40 pages long! All as part of his work as department chair.

John completed all of the above, and more, with seemingly unbounded energy and tireless drive. And much of this was being done as he was pouring his heart and soul into the department, while his own personal life contained a great deal of heartache and grief. As John and I would go to lunch together, we would talk about home life, church life, and what we were learning in our faith walks. He spoke many times about his deep concerns for his youngest child Eli. He was often consumed with this concern. And, of course, our conversations often centered around his physical health which, eventually, became the focus of much of his energy. And yet, I spent time with a man who cared deeply about what was going on in *my* life, even while his life seemed to be turned upside down. I enjoyed the presence of a friend who wanted to know more about my kids, my marriage (which was crumbling during the same time), my aspirations, my faith journey. I will always be grateful for his strength and his listening ear. (As a personal aside, the hearing in John's right ear was minimal due, in part, to the cancer that affected that side of his neck and the treatments that followed. In contrast, the hearing in my *left* ear is highly impaired, so even in this way, John and I were truly complementary. In time, we learned that I should always walk on his left side so that we could actually hear one another!)

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to serve as John's caregiver at Johns Hopkins for two weeks during the summer after his cancer surgery. Words cannot express the deep impact those days had on me as I accompanied John to his chemo and radiation treatments and doctors visits (dutifully carrying my pen and pad in hand to take down notes that he and I would reference later if needed). He showed such grace, openness, and thankfulness to others during this time. These shared experiences brought us together in a way that could not have been replicated.

I have been truly blessed to know John Roe as my friend. He impacted me in many ways, from doing everything that he could to nurture my teaching and research career, to challenging me to "eat something green" every once in a while! I am proud to say that I had the opportunity to work side by side with him, as an administrator, mathematical colleague, and educator over the better part of the last two decades. But I am even more thankful, and proud, to have been counted as one of John's friends. His impact on me, and many of us, will be felt for years to come.