

I was a postdoc for Jack from 1985-1987.

When I was first considering joining his group I didn't know anyone who had worked for him but I asked around for advice, and mostly got something like "run away and don't look back".

But eventually I found people who at least knew people who had worked for Jack - and the consensus, second-hand, seemed to be "demanding but fair".

So I flew out to Chicago to meet him, and nervously walked into that very cavernous office for the first time - and there was this little guy on a stool trying to reach a journal on the top shelf, and he hears me and turns around and says "you have to be an acrobat to keep up with the literature nowadays".

And he smiles and his eyes twinkle, and I figure he can't be too bad.

So I start in the lab and pretty soon realize that "demanding but fair" was maybe an understatement. But he wasn't actively demanding; it was more that he had these very high expectations and he made me want to live up to them.

And I realized that his fearsome reputation was certainly not based on any meanness. But science is based on the idea of falsification of theories, and Jack really loved doing just that.

Science for him was an ongoing - and competitive - debate.

And it turns out that not everyone enjoys having a brilliant person working hard to point out the flaws in their theories.

But for me that was just a very high-level version of life at my family dinner table, so I loved it.

The next two years I spent many hours in that office and it seems like every minute was pure intellectual excitement, with Jack casually throwing out all these profound insights.

So I was incredibly inspired and went off to start my own group and I was confident because I had seen first-hand just how a master scientist thinks.

I could not possibly exaggerate how deeply that influenced my way of thinking and that was always obvious to me and, hopefully, to people who knew both me and Jack.

But it wasn't until he passed away that I realized something else. It was Charlie Riordan who crystallized the idea for me at the memorial symposium last spring. Talking with Jack you never had the impression that you were talking to a busy guy.

I had some vague idea of all the things he had going on, but it always felt like as though he felt like there was nothing else he had going on at that time.

Now, this sense that our interactions were important to him was not due to Jack being so polite. Once, I presented a very convoluted derivation of a rate law and he looked at and just said "That's obscene!". So I have to conclude that, when we were talking, he really did not feel like he could be doing something more important.

In retrospect it's clear that those insights that he so casually parted with, were not so casual, that he took great pride in actually teaching in the most profound sense. I realize now that I was not "just" observing a master scientist at work, or even "just" working closely with him. I was being taught by someone who was a teacher in the best and deepest sense of the word.

Thank you, Jack.