

Jack Halpern (October 19, 2018)

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45 years ago, I left India and came to the University of Chicago as a graduate student. I had no idea what to expect and I had never even heard of Jack Halpern! When I joined Jack's group, I immediately became his senior graduate student: the only graduate student in a group with 9 postdoctorals. It was in Jack's group that I came of age – scientifically and otherwise. We celebrated Beethoven's birthday (Dec 16) in the group. It was my first introduction to Western Classical music, that has become so much a part of my day now.

By the way, at these parties we had punch with fruits pre-soaked in brandy for at least a week. The punch itself was cooled in dry ice so as not to dilute it.

More than the scientific rigor that Jack was so famous for, what I learnt from Jack was passion: passion for science and for the arts. Jack taught me that it was always a good time to start a scientific argument. I remember at a Gordon Conference, one of the speakers mentioned that receiving a fellowship had afforded him the time to think more deeply about the problem he was working on. Jack immediately remarked that one did not need a fellowship to figure out the fallacies in the speaker's approach to the problem and then went on to explain.

Jack taught me to be independent, to forge my own scientific career. He taught me the importance of being the first or the best. In many instances, he was both.

In fact, I was so happy in Jack's group that I almost forgot to graduate! One of Jack's colleagues had to remind me to bring up the subject of graduation with Jack. Jack had apparently told him that he certainly was not going to bring it up with me!

Let me finish by telling you a story that involves Helen. Many years ago, Helen & Jack, and my wife, Rumjhum, and I were together at a conference in Shanghai. My wife happened to mention to Helen that our marriage was arranged and that neither she nor her parents knew me that well when we were married. Helen remarked that her parents should have asked Jack for a character reference. I have to say that I have no idea in this instance what Jack would have said. Perhaps, it is just as well that Jack was not asked!