

## **RESOLUTION OF THE RETIREMENT OF PROFESSOR CHARLES NELSON**

How does one condense the many lives of Charles Nelson onto a few pages of text? It is impossible. No mere retirement resolution is going to embrace the people he affected, the lives he changed, the careers he helped selflessly, the friendships he made, and the students he taught. Charles is also a bridge to a different past. It is important for us to commemorate that past, to hold him and it in our memories.

Charles was graduated in 1943 from Crosby High School, in Waterbury, Connecticut. It was there that he began the study of German. Little did he realize how quickly it would be put to use. Not yet 18, he joined the Army Specialized Training Reserve Program, and was posted to the University of Maine at Orono. At age 18, his studies were interrupted by 16 weeks of infantry basic training at the Infantry School, Fort Benning, Georgia. He was scheduled to return to university studies, but for those old enough to remember, there was a war going on in the Pacific and also in Europe, and ground troops were desperately needed in France. Charles' studies were canceled, and he was assigned to the 87th Infantry Division at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. In August of 1944, young Charlie Nelson found himself sitting in a jeep, in the Ardennes forest, on combat duty. That duty turned deadly earnest in a few months, when the last desperate German offensive exploded through the Ardennes forest at the Belgium/French/Luxembourg border and burst the American lines, in what history later called the Battle of the Bulge. Charles' duty was behind-the-lines reconnaissance and spot interrogation of incoming prisoners. He admits that his limited high school German and some dubious translations probably prolonged the war.

The allies prevailed in the desperate fighting in the Ardennes, the war ended in April of 1945 and Charles remained with the occupation forces. His commander, recognizing immediately a winsome and entrepreneurial spirit, gave the young soldier a jeep and a driver and told him to "look around for something to amuse the troops." Charlie obliged by finding a fully operational brewery and buying its total production for an entire month, paying for it with Wehrmacht military money he had discovered in a convoy destroyed in the last days of the fighting. After paying off the brewmaster, Charlie had enough Marks left over to rent a complete one-ring circus, with clowns and jungle animals. The 87th Division, thanks to Charles Gerard Nelson, was a very happy place in the early days of the American occupation of Germany.

But Charlie needed to be back in school, and like so many G.I.'s at the end of hostilities, he found Europe more compatible than the US. He took his B.A. and M.A. in Innsbruck, Austria, where he also took up skiing.

He remains to this day an active downhill skier. For ten years Charles worked as an American civil servant in Germany and Austria, perfecting a German which defies anyone who might think of Charles as anything but a native speaker. He also was raising three sons as a single parent, before that term was coined. Then Charles made the move which began his current incarnation: he came to Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1961 to complete his studies. Charles was a Ph.D. candidate with Ron Salter and myself in that program. I arrived at Tufts first, in 1964, and as a result of everyone else's retirement or departure, the German Department was left with a 32-yr. old chairman recently appointed, and no faculty. In those days, affirmative action meant calling anyone you knew. I knew colleagues at Yale and Michigan. The first person who came to the German Department was Gloria Ascher from New Haven, and the next was Charles Nelson, an Instructor in German, but already someone whom all of us could look up to as a mentor, as a model. In 1966, Charles began his career at Tufts, and there has been no looking back. How many people in the university have been chairmen of two different departments in one academic lifetime? Charles chaired the German Department from 1970-71, and in 1974 was asked to chair the Department of Art History for the academic year. He was named Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences in 1973 and remained in that position until 1978.

As a bulwark of medieval studies in the arts and sciences, Charles understood the methodologies of interdisciplinary studies before the concept had any meaning. He brought the study of modern theory to a faculty hungry for new ideas. His originality, his risk-taking, a willingness, indeed, a need to break new ground showered benefits on all of us - literary theory, cultural theory, theories of comedy and ideology. Who else but Charles

could bridge the gap between the two Marxes: Karl and Groucho? But, it has been in his collaboration with Madeline Caviness and their joint exploration of gender theory where Charles' broad intellectual excellence has come of age. He has brought both a psychoanalytic and feminist perspective to Madeline's extraordinary scholarly vision, and the result has been of one of the truly great collaborations in the history of our university.

Few scholars of medieval German texts are doing this kind of work; even when they are concerned with the social and cultural context, the larger theoretical framework is lacking. Charles has broken down the traditional boundaries and has gone beyond literature. He is our Captain Kirk, going where others fear to go.

Throughout his career, Charles has remained the great teacher--of his students as well as his colleagues. The next generation to this United Nations Department in which he serves has been particularly affected by the wisdom and guidance of this consummate professional with a heart.

The younger department members have found in him a sympathetic partner for intellectual and personal conversations. His charm, his courtly and gentle manner, his delightful wit have provided a model of civility in an often uncivil world.

Indeed, the wine grows better in the bottle. Charles and Madeline have recently curated an exhibit of the four illustrated manuscripts of the *Sachsenspiegel* focussing on gender constructions associated with property, inheritance, and marriage law, and a book on this cutting-edge, interdisciplinary subject will once again demonstrate the best of the creative academic mind.

One does not "retire" to emeritus status; one is "elevated" to it. Like Faust, as he rises to heaven in the arms of the choir of angels, Charles Nelson will continue striving, continue that search for excellence, and he will undoubtedly continue to be that very special human being we have come to love.

For the Department  
Sol Gittleman