

## FACULTY NEWS

## In Memory of Professor Leonid Yoffe, 1962-2020

The last time I saw Leo was on February 28<sup>th</sup>, after a meeting of the full-time English professors in the School of Commerce. Leo had just finished serving two years as the coordinator of the English professors and he had agreed to continue, unusually, for another one-year stint, to help facilitate the development of English courses to support the new Global Management program. Following the meeting he stopped by my office, as he often did, to rehash what was discussed in the meeting and chew the fat. He was leaving for Toronto to see his wife and daughter the next day. He asked about my daughters, who he had met several times, and whether I'd have a chance to visit them during the spring break. We made plans to have lunch when he got back and said goodbye.

My last email exchange with him was a series of six emails from March 10<sup>th</sup> to March 11<sup>th</sup> about various matters. Knowing Leo was due to arrive back in Japan on March 16<sup>th</sup>, I had written an email to him on that day that began, "Dear Leo, Welcome back to Japan! I hope you had a good flight." Two days later I received a phone call from Professor Yasuaki Shinohara, the deputy English coordinator, to let me know that Leo had passed away in Toronto the previous day.

An unexpected death is always shocking, but in Leo's case it seemed particularly so. He was larger than life – physically large and with an expansive, ebullient personality. Before Leo became the coordinator, the full-time English teachers went out together for dinner a couple of times a year, but after Leo assumed the position he was always suggesting a night out. Our last evening out was January 29<sup>th</sup>, and a few days later Leo sent us a photo of our gathering, the last photo of us all together.

The son of Russian immigrants, Leo grew up in Montreal, speaking English, French, and Russian. He later attained a high level of proficiency in Japanese and, if I am not mistaken, spoke at least a smattering of Spanish and German as well. He began his teaching career as an Assistant Language Teacher in Gunma Prefecture, providing instruction at several high schools including Maebashi Nishi High School. Leo was very active in the Gunma chapter of the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT), serving as a program director for nearly 10 years. During his time

in Gunma he met his wife, Midori, who also taught at high schools in the prefecture, as well as Professor Hisatake Jimbo, who would become his lifelong mentor. Even after Leo's move to Tokyo, Gunma remained his second home.

It was perhaps Leo's multicultural and multilingual background that led him to focus much of his research on integration issues in a range of countries, with articles such as "Managing Diversity in Irish Primary Schools: Recent Developments and Challenges", "Are There Limits to Diversity?: An Examination of the Policies of Multiculturalism in Canada", and the two-part "The Leader in Both Directions: Retracing the History of Immigration and Integration Policies in the Netherlands."

Leo loved words and had a special flair for expression. I remember sitting down to read his article on the Netherlands and experiencing the pleasure of reading something which is not only informative but also well-written:

"The onset of the second millennium has been marked by increasingly emotional, often violent, and above all, partisan public debates on how to manage the flows of migrants within a state's jurisdiction. These discussions involving major social actors – the media, the civic society, unions, social and religious organizations, academic experts, and obviously policymakers of various stripes – can be observed in virtually all economically developed nations, and in a considerable number of developing ones. (...) The policies that governments choose to pursue cover the spectrum from those based on the ideology of multiculturalism, ideology characterized by the tolerance for socio-cultural and religious differences, to the assimilation approach which places more emphasis on the responsibility of the newcomers to adjust to the norms and values of the host society. The former perspective supports social and religious differences and views them as factors contributing to the overall wellbeing of the country while the latter puts premium on the fusion with the dominant culture."

Unlike many writers who have a love of eloquence, Leo was further gifted at writing simply. In "From Paragraph to Essay", a writing textbook that he and I co-authored, Leo utilized the theme of multiculturalism once more to demonstrate how to write a paragraph about effects. In this type of writing for English learners, I was struck by Leo's proficiency at creating straightforward sentences which nevertheless flowed well and contained meaningful, indeed inspiring, content:

“Since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Canada has been accepting immigrants from around the world. This policy has had a profound effect on the development of Canadian society. While there will always be a certain amount of criticism, today most Canadians agree that the effects have been largely positive. Of primary importance is the fact that immigrants contribute significantly to the growth of the Canadian economy. They open businesses, create new jobs, and build strong commercial connections with their former homelands. Additionally, from a social perspective, immigrants help raise awareness of what happens in the world. They make the media and the public pay attention to events that take place outside of Canada. Their presence in the country makes the Canadian government more conscious of its responsibility to help developing nations, for example. Moreover, as the general public becomes more and more familiar with the traditions and values of people from various cultures, there is a greater degree of tolerance and understanding in society. By living in the same neighborhoods, people of different backgrounds learn to appreciate diversity and to develop respect for differences in ways of thinking. Thus, as a result of its immigration policy, Canada has become a truly multicultural nation.”

In another section of the same textbook, I had written a sample classification essay about Japanese holidays. When Leo read it, he paused at the last sentence, staring into space, saying, “There’s something, some word...” He began to snap his fingers rhythmically, then he said, “Punctuate!” I no longer remember what banal word “punctuate” replaced, but the final sentence became:

“Nonetheless, each holiday has its own special ‘flavor’, and the different types of holidays celebrating nature, honoring special people or recognizing historical events, and focusing on special activities punctuate the year, adding an element of rhythm and anticipation to the passing months.”

Leo did not ask, “Is it good enough?” but rather, “Can it be even better?”, allowing time for the *mot juste* to rise to consciousness. Similarly, Professor Shigeru Yamada recalls that Leo proofread almost all the articles that he wrote in English over 10 years, spending more than an hour at a time on multiple occasions for each article. Leo additionally helped edit the Kenkyusha Dictionary of English Collocations, a significant undertaking in a field outside his main area of research.

In addition to “From Paragraph to Essay”, Leo co-authored several other English textbooks, often collaborating with Professor Akira Morita, including high school textbooks authorized by the Ministry of Education. His last contribution, published after his death, was a set of presentation textbooks at three levels of proficiency titled “Message Delivered.” In Leo’s place, I did the final proofreading of the textbooks and in these, too, I felt Leo’s careful efforts to create materials that were appropriately challenging and of interest to the students.

Leo played an active role not just in the School of Commerce but in the Waseda community at large. He served as the faculty advisor to a break-dance club, and he took this responsibility seriously, perusing the documents the students brought for him to sign and affix his seal to, and sending them off to complete them properly if they submitted something that was only partially filled in.

Last fall, in my capacity as the Dean of the Center for International Education, I learned that there was no longer a full-time professor of Russian who could interview students who wished to study abroad in Russian-language programs. When I asked Leo if he would be willing to do it, he was not “happy to do it”; he was genuinely *happy* to do it, delighted to help in the process of enabling students to experience another culture.

Similarly, I was asked by the Intercultural Communication Center (ICC) if a group of students from Peking University could participate in one of my classes in mid-January of this year. Because I had no classes on the day the students planned to visit, I suggested that Leo might be willing to open his Global Issues pro-seminar to them. As I predicted, Leo was *happy* to do so. By chance, I ran into the ICC staff just after event, and they told me it was a great success.

Leo frequently passed on books to me after he finished reading them. On my shelf in my office I still have his copies of Guy Deutscher’s “Through the Language Glass: Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages”, Amartya Sen’s “Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny”, and Will and Ian Ferguson’s “How To Be a Canadian”. I miss his frequent knock on my door or hearing his booming voice cheerfully greeting someone in the corridor.

Rest in peace, Leo. Thank you for all your hard work on behalf of Waseda, and, above all, thank you for your friendship.

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