



Remembering Don Lavoie (1951–2001): A Student's Perspective*

Don Lavoie was my professor and friend. From the day I entered graduate school until the day I left, Don worked extremely closely with me. I came to GMU to specifically study with Don and my experience exceeded all my expectations. After Roy Cordato and Karen Palasek advanced in their studies, I was asked to work with Don on the Center for the Study of Market Processes publication, *Market Process*, as the managing editor. At the time, *Market Process*, was the only regular publication devoted exclusively to Austrian economics—it was a dream come true for me to work with Don on this publication.

My good friends David Prychitko and Steve Horwitz also came to GMU to study with Don and he also served as their professor and friend. The three of us were basically inseparable during graduate school, and we were always in Don's office, going to lunch with him, or dinner on the night of classes, or reading groups he formed, or the colloquium he directed. He never once told us to leave him alone, nor did he ever make us feel that we were impeding his work. Instead he always welcomed us and in fact made us feel that we were contributing in immeasurable ways to his work. I never realized how much time and effort he invested in us until I became a professor myself.

Don accomplished two things as a mentor to graduate students—he stressed the values and vital importance of scholarship, and he made graduate school an extremely enjoyable experience. The four years I spent at GMU in the mid 1980s have been the most intellectual amazing years of my professional career. David Prychitko and I have tried to capture that moment in time in our introduction to *The Market Process*. Throughout my professional career I have been looking to recreate the experience I had at the Center for the Study of Market Processes ever since and while I view my career to date as somewhat charmed, nothing has come close, not NYU, not Hoover, and not even GMU today. A lot was going on at GMU from 1984–1988, but to his students Don was the center of activities. The publication in 1985 of both *Rivalry and Central Planning* and *National Economic Planning* signaled to the economics profession that the modern Austrian school represented a progressive research program in political economy and that Don Lavoie was a leading contributor to that research program. We students regaled in the recognition that our professor was receiving internationally. Janos Kornai, Robert Heilbroner, and Thomas Bottomore all hailed Don's *Rivalry and Central Planning* as the work that shifted the terms of the debate in comparative economic systems. If Mises had Hayek as his shining student, Kirzner had Lavoie and the new Austrian school was ready to ascend within the ranks of the profession—at least that is how we understood things in the mid to late 1980s.

*Remarks read by Peter J. Boettke at a Memorial Service for Don Lavoie at Price Funeral Home in Manassas, Virginia on Friday November 9, 2001.

But Don's intellectual contributions are not what I want to emphasize today. Those here today who have read his work and studied with him know full-well the lasting scholarly contributions Don made in his career. But for those of us who called him their teacher, he touched us in ways beyond his written work. He was a man who loved ideas and the life of the mind. Don was the first person I ever met who truly loved books. I vividly remember him standing in front of my graduate course in Austrian Economics and holding up *Human Action* and explaining how this book transformed his life for the better. From Don I learned how to read, truly read a book, and not just turn the pages. From Don I learned how to write—this was a painful lesson as his red pen tended to cover entire pages of my papers and then chapters from my dissertation. From Don I learned how to interact with others in a scholarly manner and engage opposing points of view. I take great pride in the fact that I published in the journal *RE-THINKING MARXISM* well before I ever published in *THE REVIEW OF AUSTRIAN ECONOMICS*—this was because of Don's influence. From Don I learned that a firm commitment to one's convictions did not imply taking a dogmatic stance. In fact, the dogmatic stance undermines the advancement of those convictions in the end. We shouldn't just talk to those who already agree with us, but instead address our arguments to those who remain unpersuaded by our efforts even though they are honestly trying to figure out our position. Key to Don's teachings was that hope for a better world lies in the dialogue of scholarship. In fact, I like to think of Don's overarching contribution as one of making the case for a dialogical model of libertarian scholarship.

Don's passion for learning was evident in the way he read and discussed ideas ranging from technical issues in economics to broad topics in social theory to practical problems in public policy. Don was an intellectual radical in the deepest meaning of that term—a desire to get at the root cause of social ills, understand them, and work to eradicate them.

Don loved the beautiful things in life—an avid photographer and lover of music. I remember sitting with him in an old church in Prague listening to a chamber orchestra and seeing him fully absorbed by the music (body and soul). I remember him snapping picture after picture in Cannes, France at the Mont Pelerin Society Meetings as well as in Fairfax, Virginia. When in graduate school, I was taken back one semester when he suggested we spend our time reading a book of Roland Barthes on interpreting photographs rather than another work in economics or the philosophy of science. What does this have to do with why socialism failed and libertarianism offers hope I wondered? But Don understood that not all the important questions can be reduced to these two—the world needs to be understood in all its dimensions.

Don loved his family. One of our most intimate conversations was earlier this fall when he was well enough to attend the weekly workshop and we went into my office after, closed the door, and spoke frankly about the events of September 11th. Don lovingly remembered eating at the Windows on the World with his wife Mary. He was always an optimist about the case for liberty, and was most interested in that case being made so that his children Jon, Marc and Gabby could live in a world of increasing freedom, peace and prosperity. Don stricken with illness, confronted with a terrorist assault on NYC and the escalation of militarization revealed his concern to me that our common cause had taken a set back, but he did not lose his optimism that liberty in the end will win out. Again, he found hope in the intellectual radicalism that drove his scholarly life. Don's love of his family centered his

scholarly pursuits—he was a man who lived to work, but his work never took away from his focus on family.

For many years, wherever I traveled I was professionally defined as Don's student. This was true for Dave Prychitko as well. Whether we were at ISEC at Boston University, or in France, or Russia, or Germany. We were often, in fact, referred to as his "disciples." Young scholars trying to find their own way in the world will automatically recoil from such identification, and Dave and I were no different—insisting on our own identities. But the truth is, that Dave and I were Don's students and still are. Everything I have worked on as a scholar can ultimately be traced back to questions that Don first put to me about the workings of an economic system and the appropriate methods of analysis for studying that system. This is true for Dave, Steve, Ralph Rector, Emily Chamlee-Wright, Howie Baetjer, Virgil Storr, and others who worked so closely with this wonderful teacher as his teaching career moved from economics into organization learning to public policy (including I am sure his current students such as Mark Gilbert, and the others in the cultural studies and public policy programs).

Don will forever be the guiding hand that prods me to be a better scholar and teacher. I am so thankful for the opportunity that was afforded me to study and learn from him. I will miss him dearly, but will continue to strive to live up to the label—a Lavoie student.