

## Memories of Jerry Zaslove

Alan Whitehorn



Jerry Zaslove with Alan Whitehorn. Photo courtesy of the author.

With great enthusiasm and generous intellectual mentoring, Jerry and Trish welcomed me as the visiting JS Woodsworth Chair at the Institute for the Humanities in the mid-1990s. The Institute's home was in the East Academic Annex, which was at that time a more wooded and socially remote part of the SFU campus. I sometimes affectionately called it Walden Three, reflecting the blissful setting that Jerry nurtured.

Jerry and I shared an appreciation of the interconnections of politics and literature. He came from the literary side to politics, while my journey was from politics to literature. Jerry and I also often spoke about our ancestral roots in East Europe and our mutual interests in Russian political

history and literature. It was part of our special bond. We had wonderfully far-ranging conversations spanning the humanities and much more.

I always looked forward to our delightfully different conversations on campus and at local cafés. While I ordered a cappuccino, he would sip his tea and introduce me to another profoundly provocative author and book. After each session, I would continue to read further to try to catch up to my dear comrade and mentor. Together, we took up the good fight on behalf of the poor and oppressed. My time at SFU was memorable and quite special, thanks in large part to Jerry and the Institute. His wisdom, openness to ideas, and generosity were inspirational. We shared not only wonderful times, but also our concerns about the fate of the world.

As I noted in my chapter in the book *Anarcho-Modernism: Towards a New Critical Theory: In Honour of Jerry Zaslove*:

There is a special role for the intellectual and the academic ... They perceived that the intellectual and the university can have a special role in the quest for social justice and a better world. Accordingly, the role performed by the Humanities, the Social Sciences and the interdisciplinary studies is critical. The paradigm is not so much that of the detached intellectual sitting and contemplating in splendid isolation on the mountain, but rather that of the ‘engaged observer’ who, while imbued with a critical spirit, can still come down from the mountain and join hands with others in solidarity to foster social justice in our local and extended communities. It can be the English professor who engages in political action. It can be the director of an Institute or Department encouraging colleagues to think, to write, to petition, to act and above all, to help others less fortunate.<sup>1</sup>

Without a doubt, my time at SFU was a career and life-altering experience. Jerry was my remarkably gifted mentor. In subsequent years, I often wished that that we had lived closer, so that we could have continued our lively discussions in person. Instead, we had to rely on email

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Whitehorn, “From Alienation to Community: An Existential Journey,” in *Anarcho-Modernism: Toward a New Critical Theory: In Honour of Jerry Zaslove*, ed. Ian Angus (Vancouver: Talon Books, 2001), 264.

exchanges. Not quite the same, but still they were a chance to chat, share our existential humour, and for me to continue to learn from him, right up until his last months.

I will always be grateful for Jerry pointing the way on our journey. I was guided by a unique North Star. He continues to be an inspiration, each time that I write and speak on human rights.

We remain comrades transcending the continent.

A big hug and much love,

Alan

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