

Lewis & Clark College Retirement Reception
In Honor of Herschel B. Snodgrass
29 April 2016

It is because of Herschel that I am here. He charmed me to get on the LC boat.

Like his namesake, William Herschel, who discovered Uranus, our Herschel thrives in music, science and the arts.

He is a champion of the underdog, telling truth to power. It began with his time at Berkeley and the free-speech movement. If you hold a magnifying glass to those old pictures, you will see his face in the crowd. Our students love Herschel for his authenticity and commitment to his beliefs. He is our Bernie Sanders.

From his research in particle physics, solar physics and cosmology, Herschel can teach it all. And he has. He is always grappling with the deepest mysteries and the fundamental questions.

Recently, he has focused on our first-year course. And thanks to Herschel's approach, we have more physics majors than we know what to do with.

I see them huddled around the table in Olin by the open stairway. Like they are bivouacked on the South Col of Everest, getting ready for the push to the summit. Planning their route. Pouring over their Field Guide, Herschel's notes: Beyond the Realm of the Senses—full of equations, graphs, photographs, hand-drawn cartoons, gems of history. A lifetime of insights and discoveries. A map of what we know and how we know it.

Whenever I get stumped or confused about some physics problem, I go to Herschel. We all do. Because he listens, rolls up his sleeves and gets to work—with math, with a physical picture, with many points of view. And he gets it. He gets that what is bugging me is not the answer, no, it's the emotional need to really understand something deeply and personally. As Feynman would say, The Pleasure of Finding Things Out. That is the essence of Herschel. That physics is a human endeavor. Physics is an expression of our humanity.

A department—a school—is like a boat. We are continuously replacing worn out boards, masts and sails with new ones, and yet the sprit of the ship remains. I've seen a lot of students, faculty and staff come and go over the years. But this is different. Because Herschel is the last piece of original timber from when I got on board 25 years ago. And because he is the keel of the ship—that huge piece of wood that runs from bow to stern, upon which the entire vessel is built.

-Michael Broide