

MEMORIES OF AARON IHDE

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My very positive memories of Aaron Ihde are both professional and personal in nature. Indeed, these two aspects can hardly be distinguished, for nearly everything he did for me in my career he did in a very personal way. Yet his personal approach reached beyond only the professional. He and I were wonderful friends for more than fifty years.

My earliest clear memory of Aaron Ihde was a meeting after a Sunday service of the First Unitarian Society back in 1947, shortly after I had started attending their services regularly, then being held at the YWCA on State Street in Madison. I think he recognized me as a graduate student in the Department of Chemistry and, after our personal introduction, I identified his name as that of a chemistry professor. Only later did I become his teaching assistant and take one of his courses.

In the spring semester of 1948 I enrolled in his enjoyable course in the history of chemistry, where we



Aaron Ihde (left), Sidney Edelstein (center), and Robert Siegfried (right) caught in animated conversation at the 129th Annual ACS Meeting held in Dallas, Texas, in the Spring of 1956.

became much better acquainted. That was the time when the College of Letters and Science was organizing the general educational program known as Integrated Liberal Studies (ILS). Aaron was to be the teacher of the freshman course in general physical science. He asked me to be his teaching assistant, and I was pleased to accept the offer. That turned out to be one of the most rewarding experiences I ever had!

At about the same time Aaron invited me to accompany him to a conference on general education held on the University of Wisconsin campus. The session was devoted to a discussion of diverse ways for effectively presenting scientific material to the general student; and, as is usual with such discussions, no consensus was apparent. As we left, Aaron remarked, "It probably doesn't matter very much what material you include if you have the right teacher." I didn't know whether he thought of himself as the "right teacher," although I suspected that he did; and during the next four years as the teaching assistant for his ILS course, "The Physical Universe," I definitely learned that he was indeed just such a "right teacher." The course was marvelously taught, not only

for the freshman students, but also for me as the leader in their discussion classes. Back in those days, the freshmen often volunteered the so-called "UW skyrocket," a combination of cheers and applause for Aaron, sometimes in the middle of an especially spectacular lecture demonstration, sometimes at the end of a lecture of particular moral intensity, such as that about Galileo and freedom of inquiry—but always at the end of the semester. I often joined the students in their show of enthusiasm.

From Aaron's lectures I learned the value of history of science in basic science education. He offered historical examples of scientific ideas in ways that basically illustrated the virtue of the growing human understanding of the physical world in which we live. Since I was simultaneously enrolled in various courses in the history of science, this teaching experience became the fundamental theme of my own lifelong teaching philosophy: the nature of science as the search for functional truth, as well as the specifics of scientific knowledge, or, as has been said elsewhere, "Science without its history is like a man without a memory."

After I had become his first doctoral student in history of chemistry—rather than just chemistry—I remember having a talk with Aaron in which he contemplated confining all his graduate students to history of chemistry, a decision he later carried out. I carefully avoided giving my opinion on this decision, but I felt honored that he had sought my viewpoint.

Because my excellent chemistry professor at Marietta College had been an undergraduate at Ripon College in Wisconsin, I started some historical explorations of chemical education at that college. Aaron suggested many valuable sources for that kind of research and also stimulated me to explore the chemical history of Beloit College as well. He had already studied the chemical history of Lawrence College, and we presented these results jointly at a meeting of the Wisconsin Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters held at Beloit College in 1952. This was the first published paper with my name on it, as well as that of Aaron.

In the 1951-1952 academic year Aaron went with his family to Boston to gain information on Harvard's general education program, which was similar to that of Wisconsin's ILS program. He recommended to the administrators that I serve as his substitute in teaching the ILS freshman physical science course; but they would not allow a graduate student to take on that responsibility. As a result, other faculty members were selected

for the different subjects Aaron typically offered in the course: astronomy, physics, and chemistry. Because I was still one of the teaching assistants, however, Aaron assigned me the continuing task of attending the lectures and of adapting and "correcting" their different approaches, in order to retain the educational spirit of Aaron's tradition.

In the summer of 1952 Aaron hired me to be his teaching assistant for the freshman course in chemistry, where I met with the students in their laboratory work. I soon discovered that one of the students had been a member of the university rowing crew the previous spring. I informed him that his teacher, Dr. Ihde, had been a varsity crew member at Wisconsin back in 1931, and that I had been on the crew team at Marietta College when we had raced with Wisconsin in 1941. This stimulated the student to gather other varsity crewmen, so that Aaron and I could do some rowing again. Aaron chose to be the stroke oarsman, Number 8, while I was Number 7, so that we old folks were in a position to stop all rowing if the experience proved too much. But we had a good time!

I remember that, when I finished my doctorate degree at the end of the summer of 1952, Aaron and his wife invited my wife, our two young children, and me to have dinner with them out in Mineral Point, at the historically famous Pendarvis Building. It was a joyous family-like gathering with splendid food!

Many of these personal relationships continued during the next eleven years, when I was living elsewhere, for we exchanged frequent letters in which we shared our personal and professional experiences and intentions. An outstanding example of Aaron's confidence in me was his recommendation to Harper & Row that I evaluate a prepublication copy of his book, *The Development of Modern Chemistry*. Needless to say, I approved.

In the autumn of 1953 at the American Chemistry Society meeting in Chicago we shared time together and exchanged our responses to the history of chemistry presentations we heard there. This kind of thing happened frequently in the years before I returned to the University of Wisconsin. During that time I particularly remember that he invited me to come to Madison, then to share in the driving as Aaron and his wife proceeded to the American Chemical Society meeting in Minneapolis. The event that stands out as most charming, however, was our attendance at the ACS meeting in Dallas. At that time I was teaching at the University of Arkan-

sas, and I invited Aaron and his wife to stop in Fayetteville for a visit. As it turned out, they spent the weekend with us and then drove my wife and me to Dallas. We had a delightful time together. While at Arkansas, I became one of the three founders of the Midwest History of Science Junto, and I invited Aaron to attend its first meeting in Lawrence, Kansas in 1958 and to bring other members of Wisconsin's history of science faculty. Many did attend and became charter members.

Aaron had supported my applications for employment for the three positions I held after leaving Wisconsin in 1952; but most significantly, he was the initiator in the Wisconsin History of Science Department's decision to invite me to return to Wisconsin in 1963. Once I was back in Madison, I felt like a family member as we met socially with Aaron and his wife Olive, who was equally as gracious as her husband.

On the occasion of his being awarded the Dexter Prize for his contributions to the history of chemistry in 1968, Aaron invited me to give an introductory talk before the History of Chemistry Division at the American Chemical Society meeting in Atlantic City, NJ. It was an honor for me to be personally chosen by Aaron. In 1978 Aaron was nominated for a Distinguished Teaching Award at the University of Wisconsin. The supporting evidence for this well deserved honor was outstanding, contributed by the entire History of Science Department and by his colleagues in ILS.

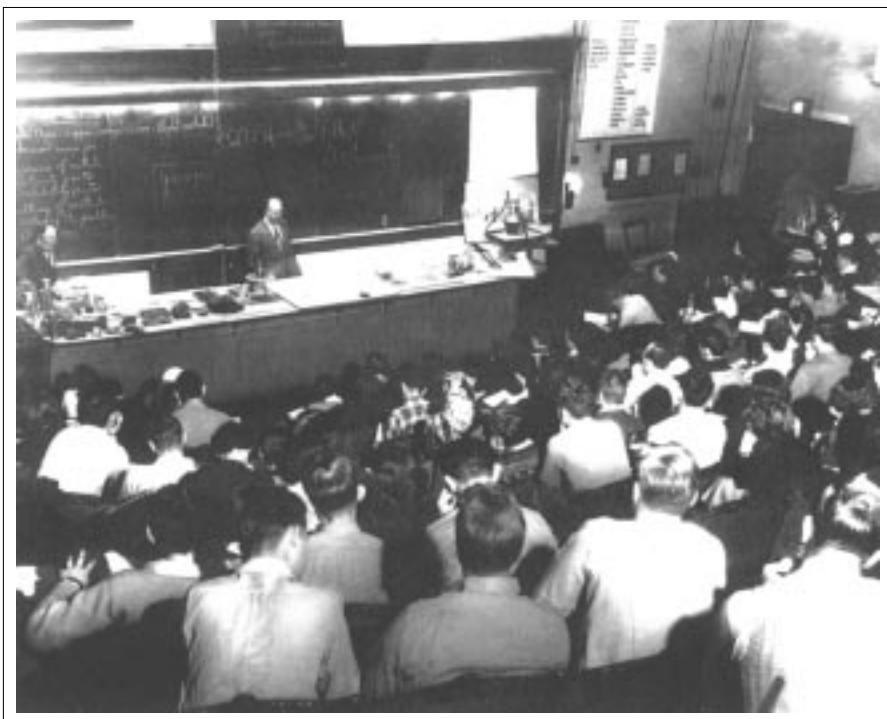
When he retired in 1980, the History of Science Department planned a celebration for Aaron to coincide with the Midwest History of Science Junto meeting in Madison. As one of the founders of that society, which Aaron had joined as a charter member in 1958, I organized that meeting by sending letters to all of Aaron's present and former graduate students, asking them to send him a personal letter of recollections, together with a scholarly paper written specially for the occasion. They were also invited to attend and to participate in the special activities to be held. The impressive result was that

nearly every one of the students sent both letters and papers, and most also came to Madison. There were 18 papers in all, one of my own, of course. Just as their response was personal, so Aaron later wrote a personal letter to me in thanks for organizing the occasion.

I have offered these memories in order to illustrate how personal Aaron was with me as my major professor. He was not just an excellent professor and teacher but, from the very beginning of our acquaintance, also a very good friend. In our relationship there was never any distinction between his personal friendship and professional communication. Aaron's professional sharing was always done in a friendly way.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert Siegfried is Professor Emeritus of the History of Science at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI 53706. He received his Ph.D. in history of chemistry in 1952 for the thesis, *A Study of Chemical Research in the United States Before 1880*, carried out under the direction of Aaron Ihde and Robert Stauffer.



Aaron lecturing to his ILS class at the University of Wisconsin in January of 1949.